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ARGOSY

STORIES BY

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AND OTHERS

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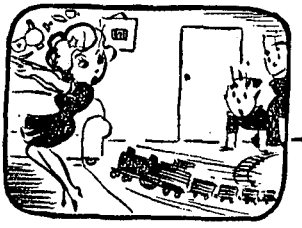

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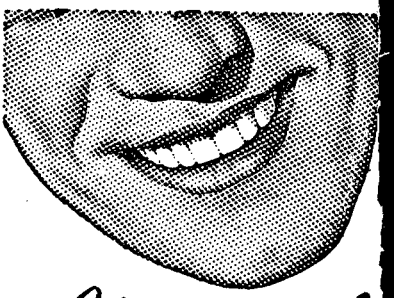

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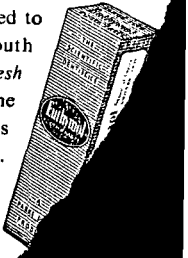

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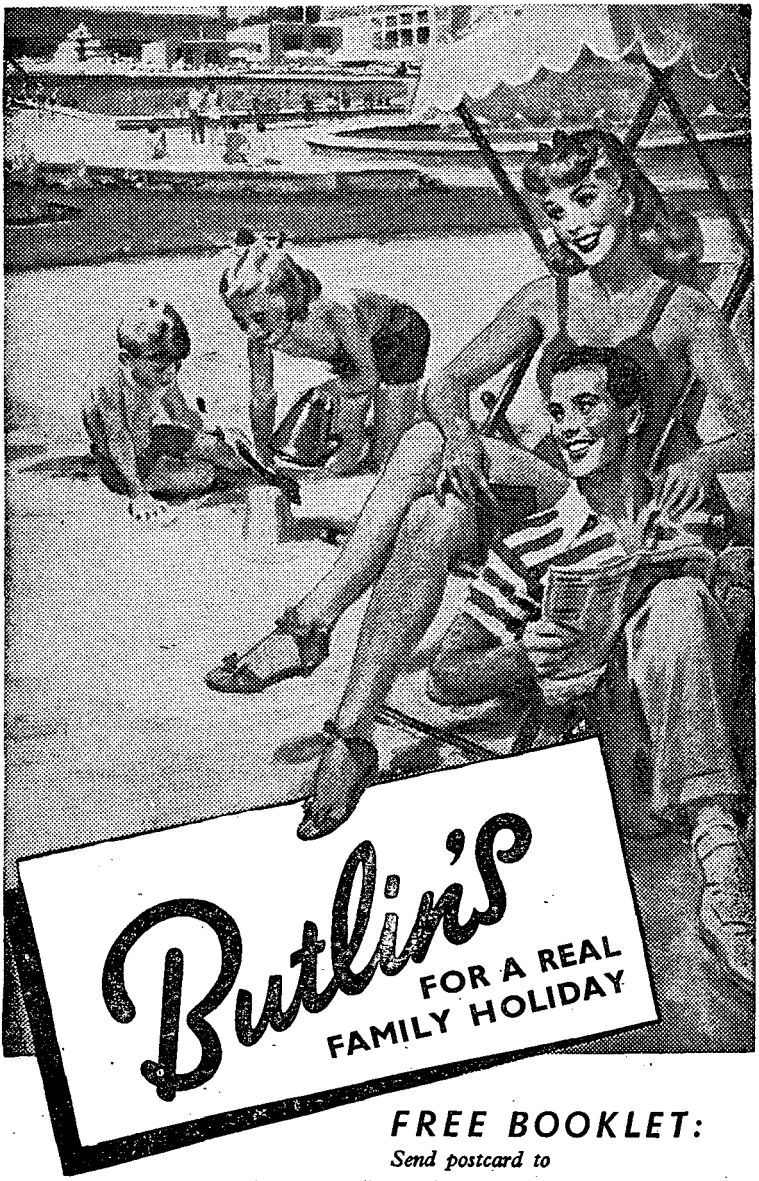

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ARGOSY

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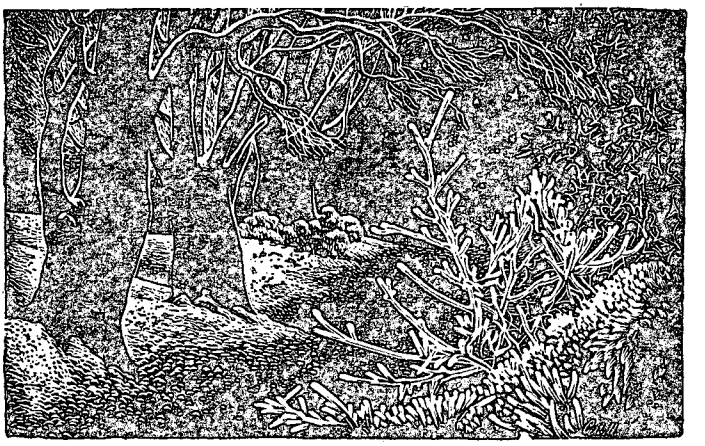

February

THE lost leaves measure our years; they are gone as the days are gone, but the bare branches silently speak of a new year, slowly advancing to its buds, its foliage, and fruit . . . With their annual loss of leaves, and renewal, oak and elm and ash and beech seem to stand by us and to share our thoughts. There is no wind at the edge of the wood, and the few flakes of snow that fall from the overcast sky flutter as they drop, now one side higher and then the other, as the leaves did in the still hours of autumn.

The delicacy of the outer boughs of the great trees visible against the dark background of cloud is as beautiful in its own way as the massed foliage of summer. Each slender bough is drawn out to a line; line follows line as shade grows under the pencil, but each of these lines is separate. Great boles of beech, heavy timber at the foot, thus end at their summits in the lightest and most elegant pencilling . . . The leaves, in fact, when they come, conceal the finish of the trees; they give colour, but they hide the beautiful structure under them . . .

RICHARD JEFFERIES, *The Life Of The Fields*

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RED PETTICOAT

"'Tis no laughing matter," I said. "'Tis only you can clear my name!"

by BRYAN MacMAHON

IN our town and beyond it I am called Red Petticoat and my longtailed family is known as the Petticoat Hogans. Although this nickname was put on me when I was a boy fully forty years ago, I confess to you from my heart out that I still hate it like the devil hates holy water.

It is hardly necessary for me to tell you that a girl was the root of my misfortune—as indeed girls have been responsible for half the misfortunes of mankind from the time of Adam until this very day.

Next door to our house in the No-man's-land between thatched Friary Lane and grandiose Bank Place, there lived an obese pudding-filler named Larkin who would insist upon styling himself a sausage-maker. In the company of Sham, the pudding-filler's eldest son, I spent my youth drawing blood, hot and steaming, in galvanized buckets from the butcher-yards of the town. In Larkin's scrupulously clean kitchen at all hours of the day there was invariably a smell of appetizing dinner.

In addition to a brown-eyed tantalizing daughter named Joanie, who is the villainess of this piece, the sausage-maker owned a normal nondescript wife and family. His chimney-corner, however, housed his remarkable old mother who had brown, all-observing eyes.

This old woman wore a flaming red petticoat such as is seen nowadays only in pictures of women dwelling in the outlandish islands to the west, or maybe in that play that sings the glory of a stuttering lout who made a hero of himself by pretending that he had split his father from brow to belly-button with one mad slash of a spade.

Old Ma Larkin occupied her time by continuing to grow small in secrecy and in silence—a silence broken only in moments of extreme domestic turmoil when she startled the household by shouting: "Up the Rebels!" in a cracked other-world voice. Me she was never done examining and I mortally feared that she had long since guessed at my secret resolution of marrying her granddaughter Joanie as soon as I had reached maturity.

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The time I speak of was towards the end of the first World War. A gang of us children happened to be in the pudding-filler's aromatic kitchen one night, seated on stools around the big peat fire. The father was sitting at the head of the deal table idling with a pack of cards. His wife was sewing under the electric light. The old lady of the red petticoat was upstairs confined to bed with a touch of a cold.

The pudding-filler took up the hand of cards he had dealt out to determine the fortunes of the household: straight away he let a lonesome sigh out of his soft plubby face.

We all crowded round to gape at the spread cards.

"She was a good mother," Pete Larkin said mournfully.

"In God's name, read the cards!" his wife ordered.

"Easily read they are," the pudding-filler said. "Nine of spades adjacent to the dark queen."

"Dark queen!" echoed Joanie in a tone that was in balance between astonishment and triumph.

Her brother Sham, who had slick black hair, cast a suspicious eye in her direction.

"Ay!" explained the father. "Black Death in the shape of the nine of spades is coming to bear my poor old mother away." A tear was poised dangerously on the edge of his lower eyelid.

At this, the darkest moment of family gloom, Joanie got a gay sparkle in her eye. She winked at me to follow her out into the dark passage near the shop.

"What is it?" I breathed.

"Now's our chance!" she whispered with urgency. "The gran'mother 'll be needin' clothes no more."

"What do you mean?" I asked wanly.

"Supposin' we sell her clothes as rags," said Joanie, "can't the two of us make enough money to go to the pictures on Saturday?" Those were the days when progress in the form of electricity and films was beginning to make flitters of our traditional way of life.

"I wouldn't like to leave the old woman cold," I said by way of poor protest.

"Never fear!" Joanie laughed. "Ma Larkin won't be cold in the place or state to which she's goin'!"

As I still continued to be conscientious, Joanie added. "We won't go so far as to take *all* her clothes. We'll maybe take only the heaviest article she wears."

"The red petticoat!" I breathed in astonishment. For the first time I was measuring the full extent of our conspiracy.

"Ay," Joanie said, "the red petticoat!"

I began to think of the rabbit-trappers on the hills and the

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scarlet landmark that was a timepiece and an item of glory in the drabness of the streets below.

Joanie puckered up her lovely face and looked at me. "I hope you're not afraid?" she asked incredulously.

"Me? Afraid?" I blustered.

Joanie then continued primly: "I'll creep into her bedroom tomorrow morning. When I get my chance I'll throw the petticoat out of the window. You'll be below to catch it. We'll hide it in the cow-stall until the coast is clear. By soaking it centreways in water we'll mebbe gain a penny or tuppence in the weighin' of it."

"Right!" I gulped.

Suddenly Sham opened a door and flooded the passage with light.

"What are ye two plottin'?" he asked.

"Nothin'!" I said.

Sham said, "If I catch ye, as sure as God made me, I'll tell!"

"Tell away!" Joanie taunted.

The following morning Joanie stole into the bedroom where the old woman was enthroned on her feather tick. But Ma Larkin had not lived seventy-five years in this world without gaining in cunning therefrom.

"Leave me alone!" "You're up to no good!" "Watch your step, hussy!" Finally, to give point to her wrath, she yelled, "Up the Rebels!"

The old lady had grounds for her suspicions: it could be that she was recalling a time when Joanie and I had forged her name and drawn a full half-sovereign on presentation of her Old Age Pension book at the Post Office.

Ignoring the old woman's protests, Joanie fussed about the room. "Are you all right, Gran'ma? What way are you feelin' today?"

I was below in the lane looking up past the electric light wires to where the old woman's bedroom window jutted from the roof of Larkin's house.

The old woman continued to mutter.

"I'm not much the better of your enquiry," she said, "Here! Out with you! Out!"

As the grandmother turned grumpily towards the wall, Joanie seized her opportunity. The red petticoat came floating out of the window. And then, even as I raised my hands to grasp it, the brilliant garment with infuriating perversity wrapped itself around the electric light wires and swung there flauntingly like a red banner in the sunshine.

I looked wildly around. Joanie burst out the back door. "Have you the petticoat?" she asked, her eyes afire.

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" Look ! " I said, turning my eyes upwards.

When Joanie saw the petticoat swinging slowly in the sunshine she cut the Sign of the Cross on herself.

The neighbours gathered round. They were looking up and laughing.

" Old Ma Larkin must be dotin' ! " one said mockingly.

" Tck ! Tck ! Throwin' off her clothes with temper ! " said a second.

" Nice carry-on for the mother of a respectable puddin'-filler ! " said a third.

Then, in a sudden access of mimicry, all shouted together, " Up the Rebels ! "

I could hear rumbling and grumbling coming from the room above.

Sham came out.

" Ha-ha ! " he said as apt as could be. " Ye're stealin' my gran'mother's petticoat an' sellin' it for money. As sure as God made me I'll split on the pair of you ! " We hastened after him as he slid away.

" Hush, Sham ! " we pleaded, " an' we'll give you tuppence ! "

Sham paused. Then, as his face brightened, " Gi' me threepence," he said, " an' there'll be no more about it ! "

When your hand is in the dog's mouth it's right to draw easy. Joanie and I readily agreed.

A fisherman was passing the lane with his old-fashioned fishing-rod all of one piece. After a struggle he unhooked the petticoat. The weight of the descending garment made a perfect loop of the rod-top. Grasping it greedily I tried to quench its glory under my jacket.

By this time the old lady had begun to trumpet for her sausage-making son. Still laughing, the crowd of neighbours melted away.

Joanie and I, with Sham in close and suspicious attendance, went up to the pump and soused the middle of the red petticoat. I got elevenpence for it in Conachie's, the rag-dealer's. Fourpence for Joanie, fourpence for myself and a begrudged threepence for Sham the Spy.

Joanie and I then went to the matinee and sat in the gods eating between us a bar of milk chocolate which we gnawed in turns with the edge of the bar held vertically against our teeth. Subsequently through the tremendous excitements of the serial Joanie Larkin and I held each other's mushy hands and were supremely happy.

The pictures over, we emerged into the bright unreal afternoon.

After three days or so the old lady got suddenly better—as a

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matter of history she died approximately twenty years afterwards—and rapped imperiously on the floor with her blackthorn stick. "I'm gettin' up!" she shouted to her son.

"Ravellin' in your mind you are, mother bawn," the sausage-maker breathed as soon as he had reached the bedside.

"Tck! Tck! Get me my red petticoat!"

"I won't allow you put one leg out of the bed!" The sausage-maker was remembering the hand of cards.

But by this time old Ma Larkin had her two gnarled feet firmly planted on the green linoleum. "Up the Rebels!" she shouted menacingly.

"The heart might cease to beat on you, mother!"

"Up the Rebels!"

"I implore of you!"

"Get my red petticoat!"

With a falter in his voice the pudding-filler said, "Your petticoat—isn't it here?"

"Get . . . my . . . red . . . petticoat!"

"I could have sworn . . ."

Rapping and banging and barging and searching and shouting and snarling. The whole house was in an uproar as father, mother, and children searched, ransacked and rummaged for an article of clothing that by this time was surely in Birmingham or Lancaster or some such cross-channel rag-centre, with its violent scarlet clawed into threads by the most competent of machinery.

Tiring of banging furiously on the floor with her drunken stick, the old lady craftily went on strike. She squatted on her hunkers on the draughty stairs pending the return of her beloved garment.

"As sure as God is in His high sky, if I don't get my petticoat," she said, "I'll stroll abroad in my shift and shame ye for ever among the neighbours."

It was then that Sham split on Joanie and myself. Needless to mention, Joanie, being female, put the major portion of the blame on me.

Babe-innocent of my betrayal, I strolled into the sausage-maker's kitchen that night. I was into the trammels before I realized my mistake. The mother was standing at the fire white-faced and wheel-eyed. All the children gathered about her skirts and gazed up in awe at me—the Great Cheat.

Joanie, the future Reverend Mother, the future Abbess, stood beside the dresser: she was the brown-eyed picture of innocence. God bless her, the very incarnation of Irish maidenhood, convent-trained and convent-destined. The sausage-maker was sitting at

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the table-head. The instant I looked at him I knew that I was doomed.

Without any preamble at all, he began sternly, "Joanie tells me that you stole my mother's red petticoat!"

One of the younger girls began to wail for me. Swiftly I remembered having given her a rabbit's scut with which she could play games with her pusheen.

I glanced wildly around. I then noticed the old lady on the stairs peering out through the bannisters. To me it appeared as if she were doing jail after having taken my sacred life and having been condemned to swing gallows-high on the head of it.

"Me?" I said blustering, at the same time inching towards the kitchen door.

"Up the Rebels!" shouted the old lady. This was a warning to the household that I was about to take to my heels.

Pete Larkin stood up.

"You!" he exclaimed. "Don't you dare deny it an' call my daughter a flamin' liar! She that's so well spoken of by Sister Immaculata of the Mercy Convent!"

"You christened her truly," I said valiantly. "That's just what she is—a flamin' liar if ever there was one!"

Coldly the sausage-maker said: "When my daughter requires a character 'tisn't you I'll ask to recommend her." Then: "Out with it! What did you do with my mother's petticoat?"

I was at my wits' end for I knew that I was treading deep angry water.

Silence hung about me as again I began to speak. I was on the point of splitting on the girl when suddenly I recalled an old man paying a compliment to the bravery of my breeding. Because of the oldster's tribute I decided to shelter Joanie Larkin.

"All right!" I said abruptly. "I stole the petticoat!"

"Ha!" said the sausage-maker.

"Ha!" said his wife.

"Ha!" said the children all together. That is, all except Joanie who was mute of malice or by act of God, and of course the child whose loyalty I had purchased with a rabbit's scut.

The jailed old lady on the stairs continued to hold her altogether remarkable silence.

"Under God, why did you steal it?" pleaded the sausage-maker.

"It was almighty weighty," I said with gravity.

"So it was," he agreed hurriedly and not without ancestral pride. "But it wasn't for its heaviness alone that you took it. What did you do with it then?"

"I sold it!" I said darkly.

This reply again begat a certain measure of pride. To the

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Larkins it seemed natural to consider that several townfuls of mature women would give their right thumbs to possess the red petticoat.

"To whom did you sell it?"

I paused. Then: "To Conachie's!" I blurted.

"Conachie's!" they all roared together as if they had been possessed of a common will and tongue.

The old lady was rocking on her hunkers. Straight away she started to wail her complete desolation.

The sausage-maker was beating his head against the wall. At last he covered his anguished face with his hands and peered at me with one eye framed in the little fork between his small and fourth finger.

"How much did you get for it?" he asked hoarsely.

"Elevenpence," I said. Then, with a further spurt of misplaced valour: "But honest to the Man Above I'll pay it back—every God's penny of it!"

I thought I saw the glint of a tear in Joanie's eye.

"Up the Rebels!" shouted the old lady on the stairs.

The sausage-maker began slowly and solemnly to intone the Night-Offering—though not as a prayer.

For the first time in my experience Ma Larkin found her true tongue.

"That the curse o' bloody Cromwell may perch on you," she shouted, "an' on the seed, breed an' generation after you! That the crows may fly in an' out through your windows! That long grass-stalks may sprout at your threshold! That God may keep your chimney perpetually cold!" Then, as an inconsequent postscript, "Up the Rebels!"

The old lady continued to call spirits from the vasty deep; that they failed to arrive could scarcely be construed as a reflection upon her witchery.

Communally moving, the whole family withdrew from me as if I were a leper. Unmolested I left the kitchen. I had not moved far through the darkness when I heard light footsteps moving after me. I turned. There was Joanie Larkin. As I halted she stole closer and closer to me, then with a sudden thrust she flung her lips upon mine.

The young girl's lips were full and heavy and wet as a dewy field. It was the first kiss of this kind I had ever received: it utterly churned my belly and at the time seemed adequate payment for all that I had suffered.

"I shall love you until I die!" Joanie Larkin breathed.

Later, the neighbours and the neighbours' children got wind of the affair.

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"Who stole Ma Larkin's red petticoat?" they jeered at me.

"Qu-hoo! Red petticoat! Qu-hoo! Red Petticoat Hogan!" they shouted.

And so the nickname has come down the years cleaving fast to me and to my children. It began as a tiny thorn in my quick and ended as a rack, a jackboot and a pitch-cap.

"Petticoat Hogan sold a house!"

"Petticoat Hogan bought a roan pony!"

"One of the Petticoat Hogans nearly got drowned in the mill pool!"

"Old Petticoat himself made fifty pounds on one drift of bulls!"

Why, when I was getting married to a decent respectable country girl her neighbours taunted her by saying that ever afterwards she'd be under Petticoat rule.

"Petticoat! Red Petticoat! Red Petticoat Hogan!"

Let me now skip the intervening years and arrive at one day last week.

In the course of my business as a cattle-jobber I had travelled far up-country to what was known as a Gooseberry Fair. I bought well at the fair and felt satisfied with my visit to this town where I never had had dealings before. After the fair I took a few drinks with farmers and, like decent men, they treated me liberally in return.

Suddenly with the figure-of-eight clarity that accompanies the taking of a fair share of drink I recalled that I was in the very town where Joanie Larkin was Reverend Mother in the local convent.

I took another drink or two to steel me for carrying into effect the resolution that had for a long time been shaping itself in my mind.

Resolutely I faced for the convent and, reaching its white door at the avenue's end, I banged upon the heavy brass knocker. The flower-beds in front of the building were pure mad with the glory of summer.

As I waited for the door to open I looked down at my hob-nailed boots which were garnished with more than their proper share of the cowdung of the fair.

A scrap of a novice modestly opened the door.

"Whisper, girl," I enjoined, though I knew well that I was roaring, "is it here that Joanie Larkin is the Reverend Mother?"

With that I leaned heavily against the jamb of the door and put my boot over the threshold so that the holy mite couldn't slam the door in my face even if the devil himself should tempt her to do so.

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The novice smiled and cast down her eyes.

"I believe Reverend Mother's own name *was* Larkin," she said demurely.

"Good, begod!" I said, thrusting open the door and pushing my way into the parqueted hall.

The gentle-mannered girl took a few swishing steps backwards. "Do you wish to see her?" she asked with bright-eyed grace.

"That's my firm intention!" I said.

After another glance at my boots, the novice showed me into a shining room where there was an oil painting of the current Bishop clad in his red episcopals. Like riding on fresh ice it was, walking with my hobnailed shoes upon a floor of such a high polish.

The novice turned at the door. "Whom shall I say?" she asked.

"Tell her it's Red Petticoat!" I said grimly.

"Excuse me," the girl said, "I didn't quite catch the name."

"Red," I said, "the colour red—that's my Christian name, and petticoat—a woman's undergarment—that's my surname."

"Red Petticoat!" the girl breathed, the while she was having trouble with her mouth corners. Then quietly: "I see!"

"I knew you'd see!" I said, more grimly still.

The novice went away. I had the temerity to take a turn on the floor and nearly broke my neck in the operation. Prudently I seated myself on a safe hairy high-backed chair, extracted a clove from my waistcoat pocket and began to chew upon it resolutely.

I heard the ringing of bells and the faint rustling of garments. Voices were raised in distant gardens. The smell of beeswax came up and set about addling my already addled brain.

Joanie came into the room.

I hadn't seen her for a dog's age. Her features had thickened and there were lines where never there were lines before, but the gaiety of her face was simply slurred over and not wholly vanished. The treacherous linoleum went the black o' your nail of legging me as I rose to greet her.

"Oh, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny!" she said on seeing me. Then of a spurt her face altered and the soft tears came.

I was momentarily minded to forgive her her misdemeanours. But my face hardened on hearing a tinkle of laughter from far-away corridors.

"I was there at the fair buyin' a handful of springin' heifers," I said lamely.

"Oh, Johnny, Johnny, you bring everything back," she said.

Listening to the distant ring of laughter, the tears stilled on

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the Reverend Mother's eyelids and on her face appeared an expression of fleeting severity.

We began to speak of the neighbours, of the matching, the hatching and the dispatching. I told her how many in family I had: that my second lad had cut off the tip of his small finger with a pulper, that her sister Ellie's third daughter was the dead spit of the Joanie Larkin that had beguiled me, and that her brother Sham's slick hair had long since vanished like the froth of the river.

Suddenly I realized that gentle gossip like this would only deprive me of my revenge.

"Have you a mouth on you?" she asked at last, using a Friary Lane invitation to eat.

"I've eaten enough and drunken too much," I said staunchly.

And there and then I drove straight to the urgency of my errand.

"That's a nice thing you did to me!" I blurted. All my softness had now gone.

"What did I do to you?" she asked, unaccountably young and arch and cool.

"Hum!" I said. "Tied a flamin' red label to me an' my family for good an' glory."

At this she bubbled over and laughed until she cried. In the intervals of her laughter I could hear the clinking of hanging rosaries and the remote squeaking of shoe-soles.

"My children have the name!" I said sharply. "'Tis unknown to God and the world where 'twill end now!"

"'Twon't be a pennyweight on their backs," Joanie said, still smiling as at the memory of an immense pleasure.

"It's derogatory, woman," I said, using a word I had seen in a book.

"Yerra, what derogatory?" she said, bridling up. "Didn't you get your share of the money as well as I did?"

"Sham is keeping the fire up to me day an' night," I complained. "I can read the mockin' knowledge of the story in the eyes of every newcomer to the town."

Then I blurted out what I had come to say: "'Tis only you can clear my name!"

"What can I do about it now?" Joanie asked, with what at the time seemed genuine amazement.

"You could . . . write down on a piece of paper that it wasn't I . . ."

"That it wasn't you what?" she asked.

"That 'twasn't I stole the god-damn petticoat!" I exclaimed.

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"Such language!" the Reverend Mother said, with a bright ripple of laughter.

"'Tis no laughin' matter at all!" I shouted.

"Arrah, have sense, man," she said as if tossing the subject aside.

"Let *you* have the sense," I said with sudden truculence, "for it's here I stay until you make up your mind to clear my name!"

"Well . . ." she breathed, in irresolution.

As I raised my singing voice in a bawdy ballad, the corridors of the holy convent came alive with disciplined excitement.

"Sssh!" the Reverend Mother said, rising and clapping her soft hand across my mouth.

She wrote my exculpation on the Convent-headed notepaper. I stuffed the document into my waistcoat pocket where it would have the scent of cloves for company.

As she accompanied me to the door, she said under her breath, "Oh, Johnny, Johnny, I'll be many a long day living this incident down."

"That's music to me," I said, fully relentless. "At least you'll have the consolation of knowin' that you've no children to inherit your shame."

"True enough!" she said, not without a touch of poignancy.

As I was going away she gave me a lovely bunch of flowers for the missus, a fist of medals for my young lads and, since my third lassie Noreen was making her First Communion on the Saturday following, the Reverend Mother gave me a blessed souvenir card fit to be framed.

She also pressed upon me a padded silk picture of Saint Joseph which she enjoined me to pin inside the pram of the last arrival of my clutch. She asked me to convey her love to each and every one of the old neighbours.

What with the rosaries, the *agnus dei*'s, the medals, the scroll under my oxter and the bunch of flowers that came close to kindling my tendency to hay-fever, not to mention the drink that was yeasty and bubbly on my belly, as sure as God I must have looked and smelled like a cross between a repository, a conservatory and a brewery.

When at last I got out into the open air I felt moidered to God and the world. Still I had the exculpation in my pocket and that was something to be proud of.

Joanie accompanied me as far as the barred iron gate. There I took leave of her. My rebellious brogues made figures of esses on the black hard road. When I had gone a little distance God granted me the wind and the wit to finish my ballad, so I raised it without let and to my heart's content.

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Mightily pleased with my prowess I stopped in mid-song and glanced back. Joanie's laughing face was framed between the bars of the Convent gate.

As I stood there she uplifted her arm and sang out, "Up the Rebels!"

Then with a laugh from the long ago she turned and walked briskly between the rhododendrons to where her white convent drowsed under the full June sun.

* * *

FURTHER OUTLOOK UNSETTLED

The state of the weather influences our behaviour—or provides a background for it. Here are eight examples of the parts it has played in fiction. Count one point for recognizing the characters, one for the source, and one for the author, making twenty-four points in all. Answers on page 143.

1. *During their courtship she and her lover had enjoyed the finest summer weather, but the approach of winter brought rain and fog—and interference from the vicar.*
2. *"Even when I long to be possessed I cannot utterly surrender." Had it not been for a stormy night and her own sense of insecurity, an aristocratic lady might never have written such a compromising letter.*
3. *The rain which prevented her from walking with the General's family failed to prevent a ride in an open carriage with an unwelcome suitor.*
4. *The mellow evening sunlight turning the walls to the colour of ripe peaches made Rome seem a refuge to the soldier, frightened, dirty, sweat-stained and caked with dust.*
5. *Wind, drizzle, rain and cold—and the traps of enemy agents—hindered his escape over the Scottish moors.*
6. *On a calm and moonlit night, two unnatural companions danced on the sands after an unusual marriage ceremony.*
7. *The grey north-east wind and dark winters of the Essex marshes made a desolate background for the hunchback in his lonely old lighthouse.*
8. *"I'll meet the raging of the skies, but not an angry father," cried the lady as she and her lover fled from him across the stormy water.*

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★*" You must not look in it for a moral," said Mr. Somerset Maugham when he introduced this story in the film " Encore ", " because there isn't one." And readers can only agree with the author that his feckless but irresistible hero was indeed a lucky man !*

Nevertheless, moral or no moral, ARGOSY *has pleasure in presenting the original story of :—*

THE ANT AND THE GRASSHOPPER

by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

WHEN I was a very small boy I was made to learn by heart certain of the fables of La Fontaine, and the moral of each was carefully explained to me. Among those I learnt was *The Ant and The Grasshopper*, which is devised to bring home to the young the useful lesson that in an imperfect world industry is rewarded and giddiness punished. In this admirable fable (I apologize for telling something which everyone is politely, but inexactly, supposed to know) the ant spends a laborious summer gathering its winter store, while the grasshopper sits on a blade of grass singing to the sun. Winter comes and the ant is comfortably provided for; but the grasshopper has an empty larder : he goes to the ant and begs for a little food. Then the ant gives him her classic answer :

" What were you doing in the summer time ? "

" Saving your presence, I sang, I sang all day, all night."

" You sang. Why, then go and dance."

I do not ascribe it to perversity on my part, but rather to the inconsequence of childhood, which is deficient in moral sense, that I could never quite reconcile myself to the lesson. My sympathies were with the grasshopper and for some time I never saw an ant without putting my foot on it. In this summary (and as I have discovered since, entirely human) fashion I sought to express my disapproval of prudence and commonsense.

I could not help thinking of this fable when the other day I saw George Ramsay lunching by himself in a restaurant. I never saw anyone wear an expression of such deep gloom. He was staring into space. He looked as though the burden of the whole world sat on his shoulders. I was sorry for him : I suspected at once that

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his unfortunate brother had been causing trouble again. I went up to him and held out my hand.

"How are you?" I asked.

"I'm not in hilarious spirits," he answered.

"Is it Tom again?"

He sighed.

"Yes, it's Tom again."

"Why don't you chuck him? You've done everything in the world for him. You must know by now that he's quite hopeless."

I suppose every family has a black sheep. Tom had been a sore trial to his for twenty years. He had begun life decently enough: he went into business, married and had two children. The Ramsays were perfectly respectable people and there was every reason to suppose that Tom Ramsay would have a useful and honourable career. But one day, without warning, he announced that he didn't like work and that he wasn't suited for marriage. He wanted to enjoy himself.

He would listen to no expostulations. He left his wife and his office. He had a little money and he spent two happy years in the various capitals of Europe. Rumours of his doings reached his relations from time to time and they were profoundly shocked. He certainly had a very good time. They shook their heads and asked what would happen when his money was spent. They soon found out: he borrowed. He was charming and unscrupulous. I have never met anyone to whom it was more difficult to refuse a loan. He made a steady income from his friends and he made friends easily. But he always said that the money you spent on necessities was boring; the money that was amusing to spend was the money you spent on luxuries.

For this he depended on his brother George. He did not waste his charm on him. George was a serious man and insensible to such enticements. George was respectable. Once or twice he fell to Tom's promises of amendment and gave him considerable sums in order that he might make a fresh start. On these Tom bought a motor-car and some very nice jewellery. But when circumstances forced George to realize that his brother would never settle down and he washed his hands of him, Tom, without a qualm, began to blackmail him.

It was not very nice for a respectable lawyer to find his brother shaking cocktails behind the bar of his favourite restaurant or to see him waiting on the box-seat of a taxi outside his club. Tom said that to serve in a bar or to drive a taxi was a perfectly decent occupation, but if George could oblige him with a couple of hundred pounds he didn't mind for the honour of the family giving it up. George paid.

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Once Tom nearly went to prison. George was terribly upset. He went into the whole discreditable affair. Really Tom had gone too far. He had been wild, thoughtless and selfish, but he had never before done anything dishonest, by which George meant illegal; and if he were prosecuted he would assuredly be convicted. But you cannot allow your only brother to go to gaol. The man Tom had cheated, a man called Cronshaw, was vindictive. He was determined to take the matter into court; he said Tom was a scoundrel and should be punished. It cost George an infinite deal of trouble and five hundred pounds to settle the affair. I have never seen him in such a rage as when he heard that Tom and Cronshaw had gone off together to Monte Carlo the moment they cashed the cheque. They spent a happy month there.

For twenty years Tom raced and gambled, philandered with the prettiest girls, danced, ate in the most expensive restaurants, and dressed beautifully. He always looked as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox. Though he was forty-six you would never have taken him for more than thirty-five. He was a most amusing companion and though you knew he was perfectly worthless you could not but enjoy his society. He had high spirits, an unfailing gaiety and incredible charm. I never grudged the contributions he regularly levied on me for the necessities of his existence. I never lent him fifty pounds without feeling that I was in his debt. Tom Ramsay knew everyone and everyone knew Tom Ramsay. You could not approve of him, but you could not help liking him.

Poor George, only a year older than his scapegrace brother, looked sixty. He had never taken more than a fortnight's holiday in the year for a quarter of a century. He was in his office every morning at nine-thirty and never left it till six. He was honest, industrious and worthy. He had a good wife, to whom he had never been unfaithful even in thought, and four daughters to whom he was the best of fathers. He made a point of saving a third of his income and his plan was to retire at fifty-five to a little house in the country where he proposed to cultivate his garden and play golf. His life was blameless. He was glad that he was growing old because Tom was growing old too. He rubbed his hands and said:

"It was all very well when Tom was young and good-looking, but he's only a year younger than I am. In four years he'll be fifty. He won't find life so easy then. I shall have thirty thousand pounds by the time I'm fifty. For twenty-five years I've said that Tom would end in the gutter. And we shall see how he likes that. We shall see if it really pays best to work or be idle."

Poor George! I sympathized with him. I wondered now as I

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sat down beside him what infamous thing Tom had done. George was evidently very much upset.

"Do you know what's happened now?" he asked me.

I was prepared for the worst. I wondered if Tom had got into the hands of the police at last. George could hardly bring himself to speak.

"You're not going to deny that all my life I've been hard-working, decent, respectable and straightforward. After a life of industry and thrift I can look forward to retiring on a small income in gilt-edged securities. I've always done my duty in that state of life in which it has pleased Providence to place me."

"True."

"And you can't deny that Tom has been an idle, worthless, dissolute and dishonourable rogue. If there were any justice he'd be in the workhouse."

"True."

George grew red in the face.

"A few weeks ago he became engaged to a woman old enough to be his mother. And now she's died and left him everything she had. Half a million pounds, a yacht, a house in London and a house in the country."

George Ramsay beat his clenched fist on the table.

"It's not fair, I tell you, it's not fair. Damn it, it's not fair."

I could not help it. I burst into a shout of laughter as I looked at George's wrathful face, I rolled in my chair, I very nearly fell on the floor. George never forgave me. But Tom often asks me to excellent dinners in his charming house in Mayfair, and if he occasionally borrows a trifle from me, that is merely from force of habit. It is never more than a sovereign.

* * *

FAIR-WEATHER FRIEND

Ne love have I for Daphnis ne for Chloe;
I fynde the woodland Breezes somewhat blowie.
Clorinda comes my waye, but poutes in vayne;
Swete love is al, but al is English rayne.

In woodes that knew the Beautie of your walke,
My Sweetynges, more obnoxious Creatures stalke,
And I, be-muddyd and berefte of Ryme,
Bid ye good-daye. See ye some other Tyme.

NORMAN PALLANT

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ANNIVERSARY AT AGUA FRIA

It was a direct question, requiring a direct answer—and a decision

by H. G. EVARTS

DUST billowed above the trail in a fat white cloud, boiling down from the foot of the pass out across the valley floor towards the *cienaga*. Not the thick long-lingering dust of wagon wheels, Lon Cotter knew, nor the thistledown puffs of an Indian pony, but horses, a bunch of them, travelling fast and heading for water.

He mopped his face with the back of his hand and stared across the heat-hazed flats, his face puckered in a frown. Only a man in trouble, or a man looking for some, drove stock at that pace in the desert noonday sun. Cotter laid his bundle of dried tule stalks on his half-finished roof and dropped lightly to the ground.

In the three months since he had unyoked his team and settled at Agua Fria, he had acquired a certain caution. Crazy Cotter, they'd called him, when he dropped out of the emigrant train almost within sight of the lush green valleys of California. And when he cut salt-grass sod from the marsh and threw up walls two feet thick, they'd grinned and shaken their heads. Everyone stopped at the springs, for water and food and overnight rest, the last stop before the long grind over the rock spine of the Lagunas—stopped and pushed on west, leaving only camp litter and a settling film of dust, but nothing for the Cotters, because, as yet, Lon and his wife had nothing to sell them.

Now in the final blaze of September, with his store nearly built, time was running short.

Throwing one quick backward glance at the approaching dust pall, he stepped around his brush and willow-pole corral into the shade of the tamarisk trees. Beyond the wagon Martha was bent over a washtub that simmered on the ashes of their cooking fire. He felt the tightness gather in his chest as he said, "Company coming."

It was an old joke, worn thin with repetition, and Martha Cotter looked up slowly. Her cheeks were flushed and her grey eyes dark and grave against his.

"They'll have to feed themselves," she said. "We've no more coffee and precious little flour."

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"Now Mart," he said. "We'll make out."

"Make out." She sighed. "That's all we've been telling ourselves for a year now."

He gave her shoulder a pat. There was a gentleness in her that belonged to a friendly, compact world of neighbours and towns and churches. She had come West with him because once she had shared his dream. But already this land was laying its hard mark upon her. The sparkle, the warmth—some inner thing Cotter could not put a name to—seemed to be drying up in the blistering heat of Agua Fria.

He said, "What you need's a little change."

"Change?" She gave him a sharp direct look. "Me?"

"Remember a year ago? Or did you think I'd forget?"

"I remember my own wedding day, if that's what you mean."

"Tomorrow's our first anniversary." Cotter smiled. He'd been saving this up, but perhaps now was the time; give her something to look forward to. "I been thinking. Soon as the roof is laid we'll hitch up the wagon and drop over the pass to San Diego. Get a load of supplies and look at the ocean. Do us both good."

He looked down into her face, waiting for some ripple of pleasure, but she stared past him.

"What's the good of that? Only make it harder to come back."

"Why, honey," he said, "I thought you'd like to—"

"Well I wouldn't," she said. "You ought to know how I feel." She bent over the tub.

Cotter hesitated, wondering how they had drifted so far apart, and then walked back into the sun. He saw the nearing horses sweep around a bend in the trail and pound down the wash. A dozen-odd he counted, with a lone rider well to the rear. They all but stampeded in their frenzy to get at the pond he'd dammed up on the edge of the *cienaga*. Presently the man loped under the trees and stopped.

He shot Cotter a flat, searching look, glanced beyond him at the sod walls, at Martha, then dismounted and began to beat the dust from his clothes with his hat. Cotter jerked a thumb at a clump of tules. "Hole over there if you'd like to wash."

"I know," the man said. "I been here before."

He was young, twenty-five or so, a stocky well-muscled man with a narrow, sharp-featured face. He wore a cartridge belt with a pair of pearl-handled navies and silver spurs on his boots.

"I'm Lon Cotter. Musta been before my time."

The man grunted. "Name's Hugo Dade. Wouldn't have some whisky to spare, would you?"

"Why, no," Cotter said. "All I have is spring water and venison, but you're welcome to it."

Dade shrugged and heaved off the saddle and blanket. Dropping them in a heap, he walked to the jug hung from a low-bending

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branch and tilted it to his lips. Riders from the west were infrequent and most of these, long-time residents of this country, regarded newcomers with more or less open hostility, resentful of their encroachment. That Cotter accepted. But in Dade he sensed the coiled nervous tension of a man too long in the saddle, and a temper rubbed raw.

" This is my wife," he said. " Beats up the best biscuit dough this side of St. Louis."

Martha flashed him a brittle look and got out another plate. Dade gave her a nod. He ate his food quickly, his eyes straying now and then up towards the distant pass.

Cotter said, " What's new on the Coast ? "

" Filling up. Damn settlers everywhere."

Cotter heard Martha's sharp, indrawn breath, and putting an easy edge to his words, he said : " Nice-looking horses."

" Fair. Every so often I drive a bunch over to the river and sell 'em to the wagoners." Dade's glance flicked towards the corral, where a lone sorrel mare was switching at flies, then out at the four oxen. " Looks like you could use some more."

" Sure could," Cotter said, " but I'm short of cash." He had, actually, four hundred dollars tucked in the bottom of the old tin trunk on the wagon bed. A bare four hundred, with which to stock his shelves, and no credit to draw on.

" Too bad. Save me hell's own ride to Fort Yuma, and you could turn a profit on the re-sale. You staying on long ? "

Typical, Cotter thought : he damns the settlers, but he's eager enough to take their money. Conscious of some purpose behind the man's curiosity, he said, " That's right. General store. Hope to open for business next week."

" Store ? Folks out here don't like their water holes blocked and their grass fenced."

Cotter said evenly, " Don't blame 'em a bit. But I'm not fencing. I'm here to sell to the wagoners, Dade, same as you."

" It's your lookout. But somebody might run you out."

Cotter drew a long breath. He realized, as Martha did not, that Dade had a gun under his blanket—and he could guess why.

He said, " They might."

Abruptly Dade crossed to his saddle, carried it down to the pond and threw it on another horse. He mounted ; then, with shouts and the end of a *riata*, rounded up his herd and drove it back on the trail. For a second he reined up, calling, " Better haul freight, mister. I mean it."

Cotter, still shaken by the nearness of the thing, turned to Martha with a grin. " We lost a customer."

" Lon," she said, " what are we going to do ? "

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"Do? Why, nothing. These hard-mouthed natives'll have to get used to people, that's all."

"He talked rough, but he talked sense," Martha said. "We can't stay here."

Cotter avoided the soft insistence in her eyes. He could tell her of the thousands coming on behind them, travelling this all-year southern route to escape the snows of the high Sierras, that a store here would pay for itself in a season. He could promise her a house with water piped from the springs, and a garden for flowers. In time there'd be a stage road, a town, maybe a railroad.

He could tell her all that, but a dream was one thing, and the reality of heat and dust and men like Dade another.

"We've had the worst of it," he said. "Weather'll be cooling off soon."

"It isn't the weather. It's us. We weren't this way when we came. We used to laugh."

"We've been working too hard," he said. "We'll go tomorrow."

"You could look for work. They must need men over in the settlements."

"Mart," he said. "You want me to quit now? Before we start?"

"I don't want to go on—like this." She went, almost running, down to the spring.

Cotter had driven himself and laid demands on her, until now they were like strangers, not only to this land, but to each other. It wasn't any one thing, but all of them. Little things like anniversaries, important to a woman. All he could offer was a hundred-mile ride in a wagon. Not even a ribbon for her hair.

Recollection stirred dimly in him and he reached up and raised the trunk lid. Camphor fumes stung his eyes as he dug down through winter clothes and Martha's flannel-wrapped china. His fingers touched a small, soft round bundle. *At least*, he thought wryly, *it would be a surprise, and maybe a laugh too, because Mart had little enough use for such a thing now.*

She came up behind him then, saying, "Don't go mussing up my linens."

Cotter gave a guilty start. "That money. Thought I'd put it in a safer place."

"Who'd be poor enough to want to rob us?"

"Guess we look pretty rag-pickin' at that," he said and went on to the store.

He tossed another bundle of tules on to the roof and climbed up to the ridge beam. He thatched steadily, tying them down to the cross poles with strips of buckskin. Later he would lay down a

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second and third layer, thick enough to shed the most brutal heat, but now he worked against time, anxious to finish the job before tomorrow.

Mart would cross the mountains with him simply because he could not leave her here alone; whether she would come back was a possibility he tried to shut from his mind.

Occasionally he narrowed his glance on the notch of the pass, but it was mid-afternoon before he saw the first, faint smudge of dust he had been expecting ever since Dade's departure. It grew rapidly, a chalky curtain rising from the trail, visible for miles across the desert.

Twenty minutes later he could see five riders, each stringing an extra horse. They came on to the *cienaga*, four Mexican *vaqueros* and an American—and went straight to water. Cotter joined them. The American, a huge black-bearded man in his fifties, gave him a close look.

"You must be the storekeeper. I heard about you from the trains pushing through my place. I'm McCaslin."

Cotter nodded. The first time he had crossed the pass to cut timber he had heard of John McCaslin. McCaslin had come West with the mountain men, looking for fur, and stayed to marry a *señorita*. Now he owned more acres and grazed more beef than a hundred farmers back east—the greatest *ranchero* around and, Cotter realized with some humour, his nearest neighbour. "Howdy," he said.

McCaslin's glance touched on Martha and took in the corral. "Where's your *caballada*?"

"That's it—one horse. Bought her in Santa Fé."

"How long since Dade went through?"

It was a direct question, requiring a direct answer—and a decision. On the one hand was Dade, surely quick to take offence and pay it back. On the other, McCaslin, who could crush any man rash enough to crowd him. "Three hours," he said. "Bound for Yuma."

McCaslin snorted. "Yuma, hell! He'll swing south across the border. How many head was he driving?"

"How many you missing?"

"Fourteen. Ran 'em off before daybreak."

"Then that's how many."

The Mexicans grinned. McCaslin met his stare dead-on and then, slowly, the big man's mouth relaxed.

"Fair enough," he said. "He's a yellow-bellied coyote. A wonder he didn't spraddle you."

"He was too busy," Cotter said, "watching his hind trail."

McCaslin gave an order to the *vaqueros*, who jumped to change

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saddles and then, as Martha came out, he tipped his hat with a courtly flourish.

" My apologies, ma'am. Didn't know there was a lady here."

A sweetness softened the sombre cast of her face, and her eyes brightened. Colouring slightly, she said, " Somebody has to feed my husband, or he'd forget to eat."

Cotter stared. *Why*, he thought, *she's pleased ; I haven't seen her smile like that in weeks.*

McCaslin said, " Must get lonesome down here. You'll have to come call on Mrs. McCaslin."

" That's very kind, I'm sure." Martha's hand came up to her hair with the confident gesture of a woman accustomed to receiving frank attention. " But we're leaving for town tomorrow."

" Maybe that's lucky for both of us." McCaslin turned to Cotter. " You know how to keep accounts ? "

" That's my trade," Cotter said.

" I need a book-keeper. Pay good wages. Start the first of the month."

" You wouldn't be buying me out, would you ? "

McCaslin chuckled. " Think it over. I'll be back tomorrow before you leave, or catch you on the pass." He touched a finger to his hat brim and rode on down the trail, heading his crew.

The animation faded from Martha's face.

" That Dade was a horse thief. And you didn't tell me."

" Couldn't be sure. But he got the wrong number this time."

" What if they don't catch him ? "

Dade had a good lead, but for a man on the run the desert was no bigger than its water holes, and McCaslin would travel faster without a herd to prod along. He said, " I'd bet on it."

" But suppose they don't. If he comes back— He's mean and ruthless. I could feel it. He—"

" Now, Mart," Cotter said, " no use borrowing worry. They'll track him out of the country."

" Lon, just listen a moment." She put a hand on his arm. " I don't want to nag. But this is our chance. Accept Mr. McCaslin's offer."

The accumulated weight of the past few months seemed to press down on him all at once then—the ridicule, the doubt, the bone-deep fatigue—and on top of it, Martha's growing remoteness. " I didn't bring you all this way to work for somebody else," he said.

" You can go into business for yourself later. Don't you see— we're not cut out for this kind of life. McCaslin and Dade grew up on the frontier. But we're too—*soft*. We can't fight their way."

If you ran once, Cotter suspected, you'd run again, and pretty soon it became a habit. It wasn't that Martha feared for herself ; in

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many ways she was far tougher than he. But he realized she saw this thing with a woman's more immediate view. He said, " We can give it a try."

" It isn't the work I mind," she said, " nor the heat, the loneliness. But we're not ready yet."

" Ready as we ever will be."

" All right, Lon." She dropped her hand. " I won't ask again."

Wearily he swung back on to the roof and went on with his thatch. Now and then he looked down at her still form under the trees where she sat in her rocker, a pile of mending in her lap, as he tried to shape the words that would explain why they had to stay on and see the store to a finish. Then they could go, wherever she wanted, but not before.

Well after dark he tied the last tule into place and came back to camp. The circle of light under his wagon canvas had gone out, but Martha's sobbing cut across the stillness. Cotter swallowed.

" Mart. Mart, listen—"

" Leave me alone." Her cry was muffled in the pillow.

For a long time he sat in the wagon's shadow, staring off across the moon-washed desert. When he heard the even rise and fall of her breathing he got a blanket and bedded down in the sand.

He came out of a restless sleep, blinking into the grey lustre of the dawn. His first thought was : *It's today, and I've got to make up my mind.* Then he saw Martha, gazing off to the east.

The rumble of hoof-beats came on the clear thin air. Jerking on his boots, Cotter got down his deer rifle from the wagon seat and loaded it, surprised to find that his hands were steady. He walked out to the trail, the gun cradled in the crook of his arm.

Martha said, " What is it ? "

" One horse. Can't tell who yet."

" That man ! Lon, don't ! He—"

" Be quiet, Martha. Get back of the wagon."

The horse came on at a run, and then fifty yards off the rider slowed into a walk. Cotter caught the glint of silver spurs and his mouth went dry. Dade slid to the ground.

His glance pried at the corral, touched Martha and settled on Cotter as he came to a full stop twenty feet away. A cold intensity shimmered in his eyes.

" What's the gun for, mister ? " he said.

The man's insolence was gone, and with it any trace of restraint. Whatever had happened out on the desert during the night, he had lost his horses. McCaslin had beaten him somehow. Now Dade was ready to kill to salvage some scrap of conceit.

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"Put it down," Dade said. "I'm taking that mare of yours. Mine's dead beat."

"Leave yours here then," Cotter said. "We'll call it a trade."

"You owe me something for putting that Scotchman on my trail."

He was coming on now and nothing that Cotter could do would avert a showdown. He was, he had discovered in the past few seconds, pretty much what Mart had said he was—soft; too stubborn to give way and too civilized to shoot down a man when he held the advantage. He said, "Where'd he catch up to you?"

"Bighorn Seep—almost. I gave those Mexicans of his the slip and doubled back."

That could happen too, in the dark. McCaslin had underestimated the man, as Cotter himself had done. Now he confronted Dade alone, with only Martha standing by to witness, and he thought with stabbing bitterness: *This is bad for her, however it ends.* And yet he could not bring himself to fire.

"There's the corral," he said. "Saddle up."

Dade said, "It takes money to open a store. Where's yours?"

"You get my horse, Dade. That's all."

Dade half-turned, saying, "Maybe in that tin trunk—" And then his right shoulder dipped.

It was Martha of whom Cotter thought—Martha and the store and the decision he had not yet made—as he pulled the trigger. A second shot echoed his own and the bullet from Dade's drawn gun furrowed the sand between them. Dade's head bobbed and his dying body staggered back a step; then his body stumbled heavily, as the glitter in his eyes dulled fast. He went down on one knee, his hat slid to the ground and his fingers dropped the gun. Then he pitched forward and was still.

Cotter stood rigid, holding down the nausea that rose in his throat. It was Martha who walked forward and knelt beside Dade and put a finger to his wrist. After a moment she looked up at Cotter and shook her head. He walked over then, rolled Dade on his back and covered his face with his hat. Staring down at the stubby tobacco-stained fingers, the gaudy belt and cheap, worn boots, he said, "I'd never seen him before yesterday."

"Stop it now." Martha gripped his arm. "Don't blame yourself. He'd have shot you like a dog."

Cotter let out his breath. As long as he lived he would never forget the glaze in Dade's eyes. "It was harder on you than me," he said. "You had to watch."

She gave him a shove. "Go douse your head in cold water. You'll feel better."

Cotter carried the body back under the trees and wrapped it in a

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blanket. Then he walked on to the spring and scrubbed himself thoroughly. When he returned to the wagon, Martha was waiting by the tail gate, her fingers laced together, a frozen expression on her face. He said, " We'll wait for McCaslin. He'll know what to do."

She nodded and then came against him, burying her face against his shirt. He stroked her hair, feeling the tension drain out of her. Her soft crying ceased. " Lon," she said, " Lon, it sounds silly now —but—happy returns."

He remembered then, a little thing, an anniversary, but important to her and to them both. He said, " Happy returns, Mart," and moved past her to get at the trunk. Digging down, he brought up his package and thrust it at her. " Bought it in St. Louis when we came through last winter—cold then—crazy thing—"

He was still mumbling when she unwrapped it and held up a beaver-skin muff. Her head came up, the tears bright on her lashes. " Why, Lon ! It's—it's beautiful ! "

He stood before her, shuffling his feet, until she stilled him with a touch. " Don't laugh," she said. " Don't you dare laugh." She stretched on tiptoe, reaching deep into the trunk, and turned with something hidden behind her. " You remember that silversmith shop in Santa Fé ? The one on the plaza ? I couldn't resist—"

Cotter stared at the elegant, slender silver-headed cane she pushed into his hands, the faintest smile drawing down the corners of his mouth. Lifting his glance to the muff, and then to Mart, he said, straight-faced, " Why, it's just what I need, honey. What I'd always hoped . . ."

They stood that way, a little solemn, a little shy, not speaking. They had been through so much together in this past year that talk was unnecessary. Later they would laugh, make a family joke of it, but now the thought came to him that she understood ; they both understood. They could stand up to this country, so long as they stood together. It had taken a killing to teach them how dependent they were, but they would never doubt each other again.

Presently he pointed at the distant ball of dust along the horizon.

" That'll be McCaslin," he said.

" You rustle up some more firewood then," Martha said. Her eyes shone and a glow seemed to come upon her ; Cotter thought she was never prettier. " I'll want to bake. Company coming."

* * *

DUAL CONTROL

A man always has two reasons for doing anything—a good reason and the real reason.

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COME TO THE FAIR!

To the roundabouts and swings and the painted caravans

It was early last September nigh to Framlin'am-on-Sea,
An' 'twas Fair-day come tomorrow, an' the time was after tea,
An' I met a painted caravan adown a dusty lane,
A Pharaoh with his waggons comin' jolt an' creak an' strain ;
A cheery cove an' sunburnt, bold o' eye and wrinkled up,
An' beside him on the splashboard sat a brindled tarrier pup,
An' a lurcher wise as Solomon an' lean as fiddle-strings
Was joggin' in the dust along 'is roundabouts and swings.

" Goo'-day," said 'e ; " Goo'-day," said I ; " an' 'ow d'you find things go,
An' what's the chance o' millions when you runs a travellin' show ? "
" I find," said 'e, " things very much as 'ow I've always found,
For mostly they goes up and down or else goes round and round."
Said 'e, " The job's the very spit o' what it always were,
It's bread and bacon mostly when the dog don't catch a 'are ;
But lookin' at it broad, an' while it ain't no merchant king's,
What's lost upon the roundabouts we pulls up on the swings ! "

PATRICK CHALMERS

Clown in Heaven

And so presently entered his own Guardian Angel. In his hand he carried a large luminous hoop . . . " What's that ? " the old clown inquired feebly.

" That is your halo, which has been waiting for you," said the angel. " Put it on ! " . . .

As they entered the celestial regions, the angel, his mission accomplished, making respectful obeisance to the glorious company there expectantly assembled, said, merely by way of explanation, " Here we are again ! "

And suddenly, at that familiar word, life, courage, spirit, and confidence came back into the old clown with a rush. It seemed to him that he was in his old world again : that life had a meaning still. Inspiration tingled from his head to his heels ; joy came back to them like wings.

Taking off his halo, he tumbled through it, looping the loop as only a clown can—not once or twice only, but twenty, thirty times. And as he did so—to its eternal credit be it spoken—how Heaven laughed !

LAURENCE HOUSMAN, *Joy in Heaven*

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Roll Up!

The principal officer at these places is generally a very tall, hoarse man, in a scarlet coat, with a cane in his hand, with which he occasionally raps the pictures we have just noticed, by way of illustrating his description—something in this way.

"Here, here, here; the lion, the lion (tap), exactly as he is represented on the canvas outside (three taps): no waiting, remember; no deception. The fe-ro-cious lion (tap, tap) who bit off the gentleman's head last Cambervel vos a twelvemonth, and has killed on the awerage three keepers a year ever since he arrived at matoority. No extra charge on this account recollect; the price of admission is only sixpence." This address never fails to produce a considerable sensation, and sixpences flow into the treasury with wonderful rapidity.

CHARLES DICKENS, 1812–1870,
Sketches by Boz: Greenwich Fair

Motley

To Horse-race, Fair, or Hoppin go,
There play our casts among the whipsters,
Throw for the hammer, lowp for slippers,
And see the maids dance for the ring,
Or any other pleasant thing . . .

Author Unknown, A Joco-serious Discourse, 1686

One Stepney Fair

There was no time to take off dresses, and amid the flying sparks, and in and about the burning buildings, could be seen clowns, knights in armour, Indian chiefs, jugglers in tights and spangles, rope walkers in fleshings . . . Here would be seen clown, pantaloon, harlequin, and demon passing buckets from hand to hand, while at another point was the feeble parish engine, manned by sweating Saracens, Crusaders, Roman gladiators, and such-like, pumping as though their very lives depended on their exertions. Up on the building, running along beams with crowbars and hatchets, were the tight-rope walkers, vaulters, and acrobats . . . breaking away roofs and walls to prevent the spread of the fire. Over all was the glow of the flames lighting up the faces of the dense multitude that surged and swung and shouted its approval of the efforts of the motley-garbed show-folk to check the advance of the enemy.

'LORD' GEORGE SANGER, 1825–1911,
Seventy Years a Showman

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Infamous, Insufferable!

On the other side of the heath, north, is Charlton, a village famous, or rather infamous for the yearly collected rabble of mad people, at Horn-Fair; the rudeness of which I cannot but think, is such as ought to be suppress'd, and indeed in a civiliz'd well govern'd nation, it may well be said to be insufferable. The mob indeed at that time take all kinds of liberties, and the women are especially impudent for that day; as if it was a day that justify'd the giving themselves a loose to all manner of indecency and immodesty, without any reproach, or without suffering the censure which such behaviour would deserve at another time.

DANIEL DEFOE, 1660–1731,
Tour Through Great Britain

The Three Foxes

They went to a Fair, and they all won prizes—
Three plum-puddingses and three minces-pieses,
They rode on elephants and swang on swingses,
And hit three coco-nuts at coco-nut shieses.

A. A. MILNE

Farewell to the Fair

It is remarkable and worth your observation to beholde and heare the strange sights and confused noise in the Faire. Here, a Knave in a Foole's Coate, with a trumpet sounding, or on a drumme beating, invites you to see his puppets: there, a rogue like a wild woodman, or in an antic shape like an Incubus, desires your company to view his motion: on the other side, Hocus Pocus, with three yards of Tape, or Ribbin, in's hand, shewing his Art of Legerdemaine . . .

Amongst these, you shall see a gray Goose-Gap (as wise as the rest), with a what do ye lacke, in his mouth, stand in his boothe, shaking a Rattle, or scraping on a Fiddle, with which Children are so taken, that they presentlie cry out for these fopperies: and all these together make such a distracted noise, that you would think Babell were not comparable to it. Here there are also your Gamesters in action: some turning of a Whimsey, others throwing for pewter, who can quickly dissolve a round Shilling into a Three Halfe-peny Saucer . . .

Now farewell to the Faire: you who are wise,
Preserve your Purses, whilst you please your eyes.

From a Seventeenth Century tract on Bartholomew Fair

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RETURN OF A HERO

"Yes, yes, but you see," said Antonio, "there is going to be a celebration"

by INDRO MONTANELLI

THE first thing the inhabitants of Pidenza thought of when the Allied troops drove out the Germans in the summer of 1945 was to put back on its pedestal the statue of the Village Hero. It had been taken down at the beginning of the war to protect it from the dangers of bombardment and had been hidden in a mountain cave.

The statue represented a naked man with an eagle on his left shoulder and was not very beautiful. It had been unveiled twenty years before to the memory of Folco Ferrasco, who died in an attempt to cross the Atlantic in an aeroplane. This had been one of the many unsuccessful attempts which were made before Lindbergh's, and nothing more was ever heard of its protagonist. However, it was through Folco Ferrasco that the name of Pidenza, his native village, found a place in history, and it was high time that this happened.

For centuries Pidenza had felt inferior to its neighbouring villages, each of which had a monument dedicated to some "illustrious citizen." To the north was Vinci where Leonardo da Vinci was born; to the east San Casciano, the home of Machiavelli; and to the west lay San Miniato, where the poet Carducci had lived. Only at Pidenza no important personage to whom a statue could be erected had ever lived or been born until the day on which Folco Ferrasco had made the historic gesture of setting out alone in an aeroplane for America.

He lost his life, but at last the people of his village found glory. This is how it came about that on the very day the Germans left Pidenza and the Americans entered it the inhabitants hurried in a mass to the cave and brought the statue back to the village in triumph for a celebration.

Antonio Ferrasco was gazing from a window of his house which looked out on the square where the ceremony was to take place. He was a cousin of Folco and just because of this relationship stood a good chance of being chosen mayor in the next elections. He was thinking about the speech which he was going to make in an hour or two at the reinstatement of the Village Hero on his pedestal when

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his old butler, Battista, came in to announce that a chaplain of the Allied Forces had called to see him.

"Show him in," answered Antonio and then went himself to meet the visitor.

The chaplain did not belong to the United States Army but to the Brazilian force which had occupied a neighbouring village. He was a tall man with a noble bearing and a great grey beard which grew all round his face.

"My name is Father Cristoforo," he said in good Italian.

"You are welcome!" Antonio answered and, as they walked together into the house, "What can I do for you?"

"Practically speaking, I am afraid there will be nothing you can do," the priest replied. "But," he looked round and added in a low voice, "can we speak freely here and be quite certain that no one will overhear us?"

"Quite certain," Antonio answered, surprised and a little disturbed.

"There used to be a door in this room which led straight through into the servants' quarters."

"It was bricked up some years ago and the servants are no longer here. The only one left is the deaf old man whom you saw," Antonio answered smiling, but on second thought he broke off abruptly and fixed the chaplain with a surprised and questioning look. "How did you know that in this room—"

Father Cristoforo smiled at him indulgently. Then putting his hand in the inside pocket of his jacket he drew out a worn leather photograph holder and handed it to Antonio. It was the portrait of an old lady with two children.

"Granny Francesca!" Antonio exclaimed. "Dear Granny Francesca with me and—"

He raised his eyes towards the chaplain and gave him a look in which incredulity was mixed with amazement and terror. Father Cristoforo still went on smiling. A moment afterwards they were in each other's arms.

"And what now?" said Antonio when Folco had finished the story of his adventures.

"What now?"

"I suppose that you will be coming back to—to stay here."

Folco scrutinized him intently. It seemed to him that in his cousin's question there was more of fear than hope.

"No," he said after a little, "I don't believe so. You see, I left on that flight without really feeling that I had the vocation of a hero. I was alone in the world. My nearest relation was my uncle, your father, who urged me into the enterprise. Oh, no, I don't

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mean to reproach him with it. He loved me, in his way, as he loved everyone else in his family, including you and your mother. In his way . . .

" But above all he loved his little Pidenza of which he was mayor and he would have done anything to win it a little celebrity and—a monument. He didn't want to get rid of me, for I was no trouble to him. He only wanted to use me for the glory of Pidenza. I believe he had always seen me, ever since I was a baby, in the form of a statue. It was only to please him that I undertook such an enterprise, not because I felt myself a hero, and yet I have become one.

" Moreover I have found Faith. I did not have it when those good missionaries picked me up half dead from the wreckage of my crashed machine. I only stayed with them so as not to spoil your father's pleasure in the statue which he had ordered in the meantime, not for my glory but for the glory of Pidenza.

" I had not even found Faith when I took my vows two years afterwards in Brazil and I only took them because it was the one way to change my name, to ensure that I would be forgotten and to avoid being a cause of sorrow to my uncle. But all the same, without wishing it, I have become a hero ; and thus, too, without hoping for it, I have become a believer. I have no intention of abandoning my cloth and my priesthood, and I will not remain among you."

He paused, and Antonio felt extremely embarrassed. Folco was his cousin and the only relation he had left in the world.

" I will only stay with you for a few days," the chaplain continued. " Just long enough to visit old friends who are still alive and the places where we grew up together."

Antonio cleared his throat with a little cough. " Yes, yes," he said quite naturally. " Only, you see, in a little while there is going to be a celebration."

" What celebration ? "

" The return of your statue to its pedestal. The whole population have gone in a mass to fetch it from the cave where they have jealously hidden it to keep it safe from bombardment. As you have seen, many houses in the village have been destroyed by bombs. Well, would you believe it—even those who have been left without a roof over their heads consoled themselves with the thought that you, at least—that your statue—was safe."

" Do they love me so much ? " said Father Cristoforo, smiling.

" Oh, even more ! Every day they take flowers to the monument; every Sunday the band goes and plays in front of it the ' Hymn to Folco,' which was composed in your honour by poor Maestro Parodi. You remember him ? He is still alive and every time he hears his masterpiece played he weeps with emotion ! "

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" For me or for himself ? "

" For both, perhaps. They have called the hospital and the football team Ferrasco, and forty-six per cent of the children born in the last years have been given the name of Folco, once exclusive to our family."

" Who knows," said the chaplain, smiling again, " how happy they might be to see that I am alive and flourishing ! "

" Of course, of course," said Antonio. " They would be very happy, except that—"

" Yes, Antonio ? "

" Except that they would have to give up the statue. You understand. To keep a statue in the square, naked and with an eagle perched on its arm, when the model is here, without an eagle, fully clothed, what's more, clothed as a priest . . ." Antonio raised his arms helplessly and then let them fall.

" They would be happy to learn that you are alive—certainly. But they've become used to the statue. Because of it they can meet the people of Vinci, San Casciano and San Miniato on equal terms. And on top of all that they will think that under fascism they had a statue while now democracy has taken it away from them. They will be happy, but—why are you laughing ? "

" I am laughing at your embarrassment, my dear cousin," said Father Cristoforo rising to his feet and slapping him on the back, " and at your likeness to your father who was, after all, a very good fellow. Don't be frightened of anything, my boy. The statue will stay there. It is I who am going away."

An hour later, before an applauding crowd which filled the square, Antonio Ferrasco delivered the awaited speech in honour of the Village Hero, restored again to his pedestal.

The shouting reached to the interior of the cathedral where, kneeling before a crucifix, Father Cristoforo was praying.

" Forgive them, O Lord," he said, sinking his head on to his chest, " and forgive me, too. Thou who readest what is in the heart of Thy creatures, knowest for certain that in mine there is no delight in vanity but only indulgence, that indulgence for men's sins which Thou has taught me, towards pride and the love of glory . . ."

* * *

SWEET DISORDER

Women are divided into two classes—the careless ones who lose their gloves and the careful ones who only lose one glove.

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A DEAL IN OSTRICHES

It was a rummy way of losing a jewel, come to think of it

by H. G. WELLS

"TALKING of the prices of birds, I've seen an ostrich that cost three hundred pounds," said the Taxidermist, recalling his youth of travel. "Three hundred pounds!" He looked at me over his spectacles. "I've seen another that was refused at four.

"No," he said, "it wasn't any fancy points. They was just plain ostriches. A little off-colour,—too—owing to dietary. And there wasn't any particular restriction of the demand either. You'd have thought five ostriches would have ruled cheap on an East Indiaman. But the point was, one of 'em had swallowed a diamond.

"The chap it got it off was Sir Mohini Padishah, a tremendous swell, a Piccadilly swell, you might say, up to the neck of him, and then a big ugly head and a whopping turban, with this diamond in it. The blessed bird pecked suddenly and had it, and when the chap made a fuss it realized it had done wrong, I suppose, and went and mixed itself with the others to preserve its *incog*. It all happened in a minute. I was among the first to arrive, and there was this heathen going over his gods, and two sailors and the man who had charge of the birds laughing fit to split. It was a rummy way of losing a jewel, come to think of it. The man in charge hadn't been about just at the moment, so that he didn't know which bird it was. Clean lost, you see. I didn't feel half sorry, to tell you the truth. The beggar had been swaggering over his blessed diamond ever since he came aboard.

"A thing like that goes from stem to stern of a ship in no time. Everyone was talking about it. Padishah went below to hide his feelings. At dinner the captain kind of jeered at him about it, and he got very excited. He turned round and talked into my ear. He would not buy the birds; he would have his diamond. He demanded his rights as a British subject. His diamond must be found. He was firm upon that. He would appeal to the House of Lords.

"The man in charge of the birds was one of those wooden-headed chaps you can't get a new idea into anyhow. He refused any proposal to interfere with the birds by way of medicine. His instructions were to feed them so-and-so and treat them so-and-so,

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and it was as much as his place was worth not to feed them so-and-so and treat them so-and-so. Padishah had wanted a stomach-pump —though you can't do that to a bird, you know. This Padishah was full of bad law and talked of having a lien on the birds, and so forth. But an old boy, who said his son was a London barrister, argued that what a bird swallowed became *ipso facto* part of the bird, and that Padishah's only remedy lay in an action for damages, and even then it might be possible to show contributory negligence. He hadn't any right of way about an ostrich that didn't belong to him.

"That upset Padishah extremely, the more so as most of us expressed an opinion that that was the reasonable view. There wasn't any lawyer aboard to settle the matter, so we all talked pretty free. At last, after Aden, it appears that he came round to the general opinion, and went privately to the man in charge and made an offer for all five ostriches.

"The next morning there was a fine shindy at breakfast. The man hadn't any authority to deal with the birds, and nothing on earth would induce him to sell; but it seems he told Padishah that a Eurasian named Potter had already made an offer, and on that Padishah denounced Potter before us all. But I think the most of us thought it rather smart of Potter, and I know that when Potter said he'd wired at Aden to London to buy the birds, and would have an answer at Suez, I cursed pretty richly at a lost opportunity.

"At Suez, Padishah gave way to tears—actual wet tears—when Potter became the owner of the birds, and offered him two hundred and fifty right off for the five, being more than two hundred per cent on what Potter had given. Potter said he'd be hanged if he parted with a feather of them—that he meant to kill them off one by one and find the diamond; but afterwards, thinking it over, he relented a little. He was a gambling hound, was this Potter, a little queer at cards, and this kind of prize-packet business must have suited him down to the ground. Anyhow, he offered, for a lark, to sell the birds separately to separate people, by auction, at a starting price of £80 for a bird. But one, he said, he meant to keep for luck.

"You must understand this diamond was a valuable one—a little chap, a diamond merchant, who was with us, had put it at three or four thousand when Padishah had shown it to him—and this idea of an ostrich gamble caught on. Now it happened that I'd been having a few talks on general subjects with the man who looked after these ostriches, and quite incidentally he'd said one of the birds was ailing, and he fancied it had indigestion. It had one feather in its tail almost all white, by which I knew it, and so when, next day, the auction started with it, I capped Padishah's eighty-five by ninety.

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"I fancy I was a bit too sure and eager, and some of the others spotted the fact that I was in the know. And Padishah went for that particular bird like an irresponsible lunatic. At last the diamond merchant got it for £175, and Padishah said £180 just after the hammer came down—so Potter declared. At any rate the merchant secured it, and there and then he got a gun and shot it. Potter made a Hades of a fuss because he said it would injure the sale of the other three, and Padishah, of course, behaved like an idiot; but all of us were very much excited. I can tell you I was precious glad when that dissection was over, and no diamond had turned up—precious glad. I'd gone to one-forty on that particular bird myself.

"Potter declined to go on with the auction until it was understood that the goods could not be delivered until the sale was over. The little diamond merchant wanted to argue that the case was exceptional, and as the discussion ran pretty even, the thing was postponed until the next morning.

"We had a lively dinner-table that evening, I can tell you, but in the end Potter got his way, since it would stand to reason he would be safer if he stuck to all the birds, and we owed him some consideration for his sportsmanlike behaviour. And the old gentleman whose son was a lawyer said it was very doubtful if, when a bird had been opened and the diamond recovered, it ought not to be handed back to the proper owner. I remember I suggested it came under the laws of treasure-trove—which was really the truth of the matter.

"There was a hot argument, and we settled it was certainly foolish to kill the bird on board the ship. Then the old gentleman tried to make out the sale was a lottery and illegal, and appealed to the captain; but Potter said he sold the birds *as* ostriches. He didn't want to sell any diamonds, he said, and didn't offer that as an inducement. The three birds he put up, to the best of his knowledge and belief, did *not* contain a diamond. It was in the one he kept—so he hoped.

"Prices ruled high next day. The fact that now there were four chances instead of five of course caused a rise. The blessed birds averaged £227, and, oddly enough, this Padishah didn't secure one of 'em—not one. He made too much shindy, and when he ought to have been bidding he was talking about liens, and, besides, Potter was a bit down on him. One fell to a quiet little officer chap, another to the little diamond merchant, and the third was syndicated by the engineers. And then Potter seemed suddenly sorry for having sold them, and said he'd flung away a clear thousand pounds, and that he always had been a fool, but when I went and had a bit of a talk to him, with the idea of getting him to hedge on his last

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chance, I found he'd already sold the bird he'd reserved to a political chap that was on board, a chap who'd been studying Indian morals and social questions in his vacation. That last was the three-hundred-pound bird.

"Well, they landed three of the blessed creatures at Brindisi—though the old gentleman said it was a breach of the Customs regulations—and Potter and Padishah landed too. The Hindoo seemed half-mad as he saw his blessed diamond going this way and that, so to speak. He kept on saying he'd get an injunction—he had injunction on the brain—and giving his name and address to the chaps who'd bought the birds, so that they'd know where to send the diamond. None of them wanted his name and address, and none of them would give their own. It was a fine row, I can tell you—on the platform. They all went off by different trains. I came on to Southampton, and there I saw the last of the birds, as I came ashore; it was the one the engineers had bought, and it was standing up near the bridge, in a kind of crate, and looking as leggy and silly a setting for a valuable diamond as ever you saw—if it *was* a setting for a valuable diamond.

"*How did it end?* Oh! like that. Well—perhaps. Yes, there's one more thing that may throw light on it. A week or so after landing I was down Regent Street doing a bit of shopping, and who should I see arm-in-arm and having a purple time of it but Padishah and Potter. If you come to think of it—

"Yes. *I've* thought that. Only, you see, there's no doubt the diamond was real. And Padishah was an eminent Hindoo. I've seen his name in the papers—often. But whether the bird swallowed the diamond is certainly another matter, as you say."

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, Birthday. 5, Scarab. 9, Fade away. 10, Script. 11, Election. 13, Smirch. 14, Nag. 16, Repair. 19, Terrier. 20, Curlew. 21, Etc. 26, Oddity. 27, Elephant. 28, Abacus. 29, Overdone. 30, Eleven. 31, Free hand.

Down. 1, Buffet. 2, Rudder. 3, Hearty. 4, Aragon. 6, Cucumber. 7, Railroad. 8, Butchery. 12, Narrate. 15, Hew. 16, Red. 17, Accolade. 18, Graduate. 19, Test tube. 22, Clover. 23, Sparse. 24, Pagoda. 25, Attend.

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★*Second Lieutenant Smith, with Rodney's fleet in the West Indies on the eve of a great battle with the French burns with the desire for glory. Perhaps he gives a passing thought to what a young man named Nelson once said to him about Duty and the Service, but chiefly he longs for honours to lay at the feet of that lovely young siren, Isabelle Laroche . . .*

CARIBBEAN INCIDENT

by SHOWELL STYLES

LIEUTENANT SIDNEY SMITH was changing his shirt. Thurlow, the First Lieutenant, ducking hurriedly into the cabin, grinned at him.

"Lord, Smithy—you're as starched as a duke. I vow the lovely Isabelle won't be long taking the stiffness out of you."

Thurlow was dark and stocky, with a roving eye. He dragged off his coat, crouching to do so, and began to rummage in his sea-chest.

The Second Lieutenant ignored this remark. He was engaged in tying his stock.

"Going to be damned sweaty in that ballroom," continued Thurlow, shrugging himself into his best blue tailcoat with the gold braid and the shining brass buttons.

He took from his sea-chest a cocked hat and a sword, banged down the lid, and edged his way out of the cabin. Smith, picking up his own hat and sword, blew out the candle and followed the First Lieutenant up the narrow ladder to the deck of the *Alcide*. Both men drew deep breaths as their heads came above deck-level; after the stink of the cabin with its indescribable mixture of pitch, candle-smoke and bilge-water, the sweet coolth of a West Indian twilight came like a reviving draught, intoxicating with the scent of orange-blossom wafted from the shore.

The *Alcide* lay a little astern of Rodney's great line-of-battle ships, whose towering spars and fretted rigging made a black frieze against the long bar of sunset-saffron to westward. The fleet lay at anchor between the picturesque horns of Castries harbour, volcanic peaks rising a sheer three hundred feet from the water like jet-black shapes cut out of paper. The white houses of Castries, a quarter of a mile away across the peacock hues of the harbour waters, glimmered among the orange trees below higher tree-clad

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peaks that loomed under a sky of blue-green. A few yellow lights shone at the water's edge, sending long wavering lines of gold across the surface almost to the frigate's side. Higher up the velvet blackness of the mountain-side a galaxy of lights showed where the Governor's residence prepared to honour the Governor's guests.

The island of St. Lucia, meditated Lieutenant Smith, was as magical a place as Prospero's island, and Isabelle Laroche a lovelier Miranda than Shakespeare could have pictured. . . .

Smith clambered down the ladder into the waiting boat, whose crew sat silent with oars tossed.

The First Lieutenant slid down into the sternsheets beside Smith and took the tiller.

"Push off! . . . Oars! . . . Give way together!"

The boat headed for the lights of the quay, slitting a trail of phosphorescence across the dark water.

Lieutenant Smith, his eyes fixed on the gay cluster of lights high among the trees, thought of long lashes veiling liquid brown eyes, of a slim waist and shoulders ivory-white and smooth . . . Isabelle. He had met her for the first time two days before, when the Admiral had commanded his attendance at the official welcome of the Isle of St. Lucia to His Majesty's Fleet. They had exchanged the merest courtesies and two glances. But he had fallen madly in love. Or so he fancied; he was, after all, eighteen years old, and she perhaps seventeen. The second of those two glances had given him little cause for despair. Isabelle had the French fluency in *le langage des yeux*, and had packed as much into one long look as any girl with a stringy duenna at her side and a personable young man bowing before her could well be expected to do.

Lieutenant Smith had no delusions of unworthiness. Boldness, in his philosophy—matured and crystallized since a certain interview five years ago in a Portsmouth inn—was the only virtue in conducting a man's more important affairs. Tonight he would get Isabelle to himself if all the old women in St. Lucia were ranged round her . . .

"'Vast pulling! Well rowed, all!"

They slid neatly alongside the wooden "brow" that floated against the quay. Thurlow, grasping his hampering sword, sprang ashore, and Smith followed. The rough path curved uphill past the warehouses and the huts of the negroes. The smell of rum-casks and rotting fruit gave place to the heady scent of the orange-groves. Through the trees they came up a last steep ascent to the Governor's house, and lights, and the mingled sounds of music and chatter.

The wide pillared porch with its hanging lanterns admitted the guests to a long low room ablaze with candles and alive with people. A black majordomo covered with gold braid begged their

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names and then bellowed them to an inattentive throng that filled the polished floor. Women in every shade and pattern of silk and taffeta, with hair powdered or free from powder, men in gay coats and tight breeches and glittering small-swords, curtseyed and bowed and drowned with talk and laughter the efforts of a string band of coloured musicians at one end of the room. The blue-and-white of the Navy dotted the mass of brighter colour. There was the Admiral, slim and dapper, almost feminine in pose and gesture, chatting with a red-faced gentleman in a wig who must be the Governor.

"Rum-shrub, sah? Fine sherry, sah?" A grinning red-coated Carib proffered a tray.

"Thank'ee, my lad," Thurlow said. "I need it. Smithy—lord, man, where's your thirst?"

For Lieutenant Smith was off into the crowd, steering a course for the furthest corner. His light, springy stride brought him swiftly to her. She sat between two ladies of grim aspect, fanning herself with a gaud of bright feathers and glancing shyly from time to time at a group of British naval officers who stood a little way off apparently awed by her guardians. As he approached the musicians struck up a louder tune and the crowd on the floor began to open and form a pattern.

"Mademoiselle—your most humble." Isabelle found herself regarding the top of his head. "The quadrille, I think. You will honour me?"

She laughed into his eyes, her hand lay in his, she was away with him into the centre of the room before her twin guardians had finished simpering into their fans. She was in a billowing gown of pale yellow, her black hair piled on top of her head and bound with a thin ribbon of gold. Her cheeks were flushed and her parted lips trembled with excitement. Somehow he took his eyes from her loveliness and found a place for them in a set—the quadrille required four couples—and the formal movement of the dance began.

She floated through the stiff measures of the dance like thistle-down, she had the free grace of youth, the frank delight of beauty in its own attractiveness. Lieutenant Smith experienced simultaneously joy and despair; joy in his nearness to this loveliness, despair in the interminable nature of the quadrille.

It ended at last. He had Isabelle on his arm, across the swarming floor, and out of one of the doors that gave on to the Gubernatorial gardens, in a matter of seconds.

"Monsieur—*je vous prie*—" Isabelle panted, half-laughing, half-afraid.

"Mademoiselle!"

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The Lieutenant took from his pocket something that gleamed faintly in the starlight. It was a thin gold chain from the end of which depended a figure of carved ivory no bigger than a fingernail, a tiny idol whose eyes were diamonds.

"I—I dare to hope you will wear this for me, mademoiselle," he said, low-voiced. "I got it from the Carib woman on the quay—they say she's a witch. This idol brings to its wearer whatever she may—desire."

She did not resist him as he slipped the chain over her head.

"Monsieur is *très gentil*," she whispered. "But he goes very quick. I am not use' to go so quick."

"It's because we've so little time, mademoiselle," he told her urgently. "And I've a great deal to say. I may be recalled to my ship at any moment. There's to be an engagement, when De Grasse comes out of Martinique."

"An engagement? That is a battle at sea?" She was prettily alarmed. "You go to fight?"

"Yes—a fight, Isabelle, a big battle," he murmured. "There'll be glory to be won, my dear, and if I've the luck I'll win some—for you."

"For me!" She came a little closer. "But, Monsieur, you may be hurt! Perhaps—perhaps killed!"

"Not I," he assured her with the confidence of youth in its own immortality. "I'll come back—with glory to lay at your pretty feet, my princess!"

"Monsieur!"

"Isabelle—you must have seen I'm in love with you. Desperately, madly, damme! Tell me I may hope, tell me you'll—"

He was drawing her closer to him. She snatched her hands away quickly. Yet there was laughter and excitement, not anger, in her voice.

"You have seen me twice only, Monsieur—are you then mad, as I have heard the English are mad?"

"I'm mad for you, Isabelle." He groped for her hand. "I want to take you away with me, to marry you."

She drew away from him again.

"*Vraiment*, you are mad! My father, he is a Frenchman, an enemy to the English. And I, I am French also."

"You're St. Lucians both. And St. Lucia's a British island."

"I came to St. Lucia, Monsieur, from France, to join my father, who came here when this island was of France." He could not tell whether her haughty tone was mockery or not. "My father would kill me rather than let me marry an Englishman. Also, Monsieur—I am betrothed to a Frenchman, a soldier of France."

"You—betrothed!" Lieutenant Smith gasped the words.

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"*Oui*, Monsieur. He is a De Guichen of Normandy."

Lieutenant Smith, after a moment of stunned silence, perceived that there was only one course for a gentleman. He took a step backwards and bowed stiffly.

"Mademoiselle. I ask pardon. Shall we go back?"

Isabelle caught her breath. She did not want this exciting adventure to end thus.

"We—we were betrothed before I left France," she whispered, leaning a little towards him. "I have not seen him since. Perhaps—perhaps he is killed or—*oh!*"

Lieutenant Smith's arms were round her. She was crushed fiercely to his breast.

"You don't love him!" he exulted, his lips close to hers. "You shall forget him. I love you, Isabelle, you'll sail with me to England. Tell me you'll come away with me?"

She strained away from him, but her fingers held to the lapels of his uniform and her face was upturned to his. Beneath the thin gown her body was soft and warm and yielding under his fingers. His lips sought and found the ripe fruit of hers . . .

"*Non—non!*" she panted, after a satisfactory interval. "You—you are *méchant*, Monsieur! My father—"

"He cannot stop us!" he said fiercely, his hands moving upon her. "I'll have a boat—by night—you shall bring what things you need, and come secretly to the quay. I'll arrange everything. There's a chaplain aboard the flagship—"

Her fingers, tightening hard upon his arm, checked him. Both fell silent, listening. Faint and clear and beautiful on the still air sang the notes of a bugle.

"The recall," said the Lieutenant. He stiffened, flinging back his head. "I must go, *ma belle*. The French fleet's out."

She clutched at him now, excitement and anxiety—and perhaps a latent sense of the dramatic—waking in her.

"You must not be hurt—you must come back—"

He pulled her to him, kissed her lips, her white neck, her bare shoulders.

"I shall come back, Isabelle. And you shall be ready—to come away with me, my dear."

He let her go then, kissed her hand with a magnificent flourish, and ran quickly up the path towards the house.

From the tilted quarterdeck of the *Alcide* Lieutenant Sidney Smith surveyed gloomily a plain of blue water on whose horizon green hills lifted into an air of shimmering pearl. Those hills, he knew too well, were the island of Puerto Rico; and they were two hundred, perhaps three hundred, miles to the north-west of the

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place where Rodney and the main fleet must have encountered the French under De Grasse three days before.

"Keep her closer!" he snapped ill-temperedly at the helmsman.

"Aye aye, sir." The answer came in a growl. Tempers were short on board the *Alcide* that morning of the twelfth of April.

Doubtless they were equally short on board the two ships that cruised in company with the frigate: *Panther*, a frigate of thirty-two guns, and the line-of-battle ship *Arrogant*, 74. Rodney had detached this little squadron to cruise in the Mona Passage, between Haiti and Puerto Rico, for the purpose of intercepting any stragglers who might escape the main battle. The officers and men of the squadron were not grateful. They had cruised according to orders, and not a sail had they seen. Now the squadron was headed for St. Lucia again. They saw themselves listening to the story, told by their fellows, of the great battle in which they had taken no part: a battle, as some few of them realized, that might change the course of history.

In this year of 1782 England stood in danger of utter defeat and beggary. Faced with the enmity of Holland and France and Spain close to her own shores, waging a losing battle against the increasing power of the American colonists, threatened by France in the new colony of India, it was no unlikely prospect that she would be shorn of all her rich possessions and stripped of that command of the seas which was already slipping from her grasp. The surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, enforced by the presence of a French fleet under this same Admiral de Grasse who commanded in the West Indies, had made defeat there a certainty. Only by a decisive victory over the most powerful sea force in the world, the French fleet, could Britain retain even a place among the world powers. And the main fleet of France had sailed with 5,000 soldiers on board to join with the Spanish fleet at Haiti, thence to capture Jamaica and sweep the British from the American seas.

The one purpose of the Comte de Grasse was to make that junction. The one purpose of Admiral Sir George Rodney was to prevent it at all costs.

Of all this Lieutenant Smith, pacing the *Alcide*'s quarterdeck with springy impatient strides, was careless—if indeed he realized it at all. He saw only that his chance of glory, perhaps of promotion, had escaped him after all. To creep back into harbour after what was no more than a pleasure cruise, to return to Isabelle with nothing to lay at her dainty feet—this was gall and wormwood indeed.

Captain Peel, a sardonic hop-pole of a man, stalked up the ladder from the gundeck. Smith lifted his hat in salute.

"Course?" demanded the captain briefly.

"East by south, sir."

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"Fetch your sextant, if you please. We'll take our nooning."

Smith turned to obey. He checked himself, one foot on the ladder. From the masthead came a high thin hail.

"Sail-ho! Starb'd bow!"

The lieutenant sprang back to the quarterdeck, his face beaming.

"By heaven, sir—it's them!"

"Your sextant, Mr. Smith! And improve your grammar."

Lieutenant Smith was gone, and in a moment came leaping back to the quarterdeck, a large leather case under his arm.

"Sextant, sir," he said breathlessly. "Is it—are they Frogs, sir?"

As if to answer him came the seagull voice from the masthead.

"Deck there! Five sail only—French colours!"

Across the huge arena of the blue Caribbean the two squadrons drew slowly together.

It was not until nearly a week later that Lieutenant Smith heard the full story of the Battle of the Leeward Islands, in which his own part, though detached, was by no means unimportant. He heard then how Rodney had been becalmed and unable at first to bring De Grasse to battle; how the French admiral had missed his chance of crushing the British van while the rear was lying helpless under the lee of Dominica; how Rodney, catching his enemy at last in the Saintes Passage, had broken the French line in two places, made prizes of five line-of-battle ships including the flagship with De Grasse himself on board, and battered and scattered most of the rest. There was much debate, afterwards, as to whether Sir George had not in his turn missed a chance of completely annihilating the French fleet. Had Lieutenant Smith known of this on the afternoon of 12th April, as he stood at the quarter-deck rail and gazed eagerly at the five French ships, he would have praised God for Admiral Rodney's shortcomings.

They were less than a mile apart now. The two line-of-battle ships, one of them a monster of 100 guns, had borne away to westward a little, and the two frigates and the sloop which made up the rest of the enemy squadron were beyond them on the same course. Chantrell, the post-captain in command of *Arrogant* and of the British squadron, had turned his three ships in line on a converging course. With the wind dead astern they were rapidly nearing the enemy craft; *Panther*, ahead, and *Alcide* led the line, being the faster ships.

"The big fellow's taken punishment, gentlemen," observed Captain Peel, lowering his glass from a scrutiny of the 100-gun ship. "She's been in action—starboard broadside half smashed, or I'm a Dutchman."

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"You'll engage her, sir?" demanded Lieutenant Smith eagerly.

"My orders, Mr. Smith, are to engage one of the frigates," returned the captain coldly. "The *Arrogant*, I presume, will—Mr. Bonney! If you take your eyes from the flagship's yardarm again for one instant, I'll—"

"Please, sir—signal, sir!" squeaked Bonney, jumping up and down wildly. "General signal—engage!"

The British line of three had drawn well ahead of the French 100-gun ship. Now they turned—scarcely a quarter of a mile from their adversaries—and headed together for the two line-of-battle ships. *Panther*, swooping across the blue with snowy canvas heeling her over, crossed the bows of the leading Frenchman a minute before *Alcide* pierced the gap between the big ship and the 74 astern of her. Smith saw *Panther*'s side flame and vanish into billowing smoke. There was that one moment of sheer beauty—the blue glitter of afternoon seas, white sails towering, great painted hulls with the parted waters hissing and creaming along them. Then the roar of the *Panther*'s guns smashed beauty into fragments, heralded smoke and flame and destruction.

"Stand by, Mr. Thurlow," said Peel.

"Aye aye, sir . . . Steady at your guns, men!"

Under the arching foot of a sail Smith saw the yellow-and-black hull of the big Frenchman rushing towards the *Alcide* as she sped for the gap. The bows of the 74 were not a hundred fathoms away on the other hand.

"All guns fire as they bear," said Peel, almost casually.

"Fire as you bear!" Thurlow bellowed.

A ball from the fore-chasers of the 74 whistled overhead and a halyard snapped like a whiplash. The *Alcide*'s for'ard guns roared. The irregular thunder shook the frigate as it boomed its way along the gundeck. Musketry crackled, a man shrieked piercingly, the high poop of the Frenchman suddenly loomed overhead. Smith caught a glimpse of white uniforms and red hats and levelled muskets perched as on a flying balcony above the quarterdeck. He saw the black muzzle of a stern-chaser pointing apparently straight at him and felt the shock of displaced air as it fired. Then they were past, into open water with *Panther* racing level away from the line-of-battle ships.

"See that your boarding-party is intact, Mr. Smith, if you please," said Peel, pleasantly, as he always spoke in action.

"Aye aye, sir."

As he hurried down to the gundeck and for'ard, Lieutenant Smith glanced at the enemy frigates. They were closing fast. *Panther* would engage the Frog on the starboard bow, he judged; *Alcide* would have the other frigate and the sloop to deal with—

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and that in three minutes at the most. From astern came thunder and counter-thunder. *Arrogant* had engaged, probably with both the line-of-battle ships. He ran between the groups of powder-blackened men swabbing and ramming and running-out their guns, found the for'ard crews from which a boarding-party would be drawn if necessary, swept his eye over the grinning men and the rows of shining cutlasses under the bulwarks. All present. He ran back, checking his pace to a stride as he recollected himself. As he climbed, erect and leisurely now, to the captain's side, the air sang with unearthly keening. Rents appeared in the *Alcide*'s canvas, rigging snapped like a volley of pistol shots, a spar fell like a flung lance from aloft, its crash lost in the roar of the French frigate's broadside.

"High," said Peel deprecatingly. "Poor gunnery. And—by heaven, we've got them!"

He pointed, shaken out of his easy calm. The French frigate had borne up to bring her starboard broadside to bear. Now she was bearing up farther to go about, to bring her port guns to bear for the second broadside. But she had been too slow. Head to wind, her long bowsprit pointing almost at the onrushing *Alcide*, she hung in stays with canvas flapping wildly. The sloop had gone out of sight behind her; and if that sloop stayed to fight—

"Starboard guns! Sheer her close, there, helm!"

Like a stooping hawk the frigate bore down on her prey.

"Stand by . . . fire!" yelled Thurlow.

The black hull of the French frigate, which had come suddenly into Smith's view, disappeared in a great uprush of dun-coloured smoke. *Alcide* reeled and quivered to the single detonation of seventeen guns. As she drew clear of the smother those on her quarterdeck saw the French frigate's mainmast topple and fall in a tangle of gear and canvas. Ragged holes gaped in her sides. Her decks were a shambles. *Alcide*'s gunners cheered hoarsely, but into their cheering Peel's voice cut like a knife.

"Stand to your guns, there! Boatswain, number three crew for punishment." He whipped round to the helmsman. "Starboard a point—more—keep her there."

The sloop had indeed no chance, outweighed and outranged. *Alcide*'s larboard broadside took effect on her hull and a lucky shot appeared to have disabled her steering-gear. She flew up into the wind, there was a mad rushing on her decks, and a moment later her colours came fluttering down from the peak, to the mad cheering of the British.

"Wear ship!" Peel ordered.

The frigate swung round to head northward again. The battle area lay before her: the disabled French frigate, helpless and

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oozing black smoke; *Panther* and her adversary still exchanging broadsides a mile away to the westward; ahead a great cloud of dun smoke from which emerged topmasts and flags, a cloud whose centre was a nucleus of red flashes. *Arrogant* was there, between the two line-of-battle ships.

Alcide bore away to windward, her decks an orderly hubbub of reloading. The boatswain swung himself on to the quarterdeck and tugged at a greying forelock.

"Well, Cragg?" rapped the captain.

"No dead, sir. Mr. Bonney, he've lost a leg. Four men down wi' musket-shots, none on 'em bad, sir."

"Very good, Cragg. We've been lucky—and the men have done well. Serve double tots, and look lively."

Peel put his glass to his eye.

"*Arrogant*'s pounded the 74," he said, "but she's lost her foremast. They're not board-and-board yet, and the big Frenchman's holding off at musket-range—she's the *Impérieuse*, I think, and chock-a-block with King Louis' soldiers."

He paused and fingered his chin.

"I believe, gentlemen, my duty is to lay my ship alongside *Impérieuse*. Mr. Thurlow, I want quoins under the starboard guns. See that they have maximum elevation. Mr. Smith, the port gun-crews will form an auxiliary boarding-party. Cragg will command. Muster your own boarding-party aft here. You'll lead them up the side from the quarterdeck, as soon as we touch. I shall lay her alongside with my poop under her waist."

Lieutenant Smith descended to the gundeck with his head in the air and his flushed face set in an expression of the utmost nonchalance. His moment was at hand. He found the boatswain finishing the serving out of rum and gave him his orders in so elaborately unconcerned a manner that Cragg was constrained to hide a grin behind his leathery palm. He mustered his own party of hairy muscular tars at the foot of the quarterdeck ladder and addressed them briefly.

"We're going to board, my lads." (The majority of them were twice his age.) "She's a big vessel and you'll have to climb like monkeys. You'll board from quarterdeck and poop, and you've only French soldiers to face. About three hundred of 'em. Right. Stand by and no talking, damme!"

The frigate had altered course with the wind on her starboard quarter. She was bearing down obliquely on that dun cloud whose billowing wreaths seemed to shiver with the ceaseless thunder of the guns. Through a momentary gap in the veil the great yellow-and-black side of the *Impérieuse* showed and vanished.

The frigate crept into the fringes of the cloud. The thick

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vapour caught at the throat, sulphurous and choking. A great wall of yellow-and-black loomed suddenly like a cliff.

"Hard a-larboard!" rapped Peel.

Sails cracked as *Alcide* swung and heeled. A yell from Thurlow, and the frigate's broadside roared at a fathom's range, followed by another and heavier shock as her side ground along the timbers of the Frenchman.

"Away boarders!" screeched Peel above the din.

Lieutenant Smith leaped for the edge of a gunport and flung himself up the sloping side. A clubbed musket swung at him as he gained the Frenchman's rail. He dodged beneath the blow, whipped out his sword as he straddled the rail, and slashed at the white-uniformed soldier who opposed him. The man gave ground, clutching his shoulder.

His feet were on the enemy's deck, and a glance showed him the position. At the rail stood a ragged double rank of white uniforms, pouring musketry fire into the British ship. The deafening noise of cannonading and musketry, shouts and screams, had left many of them still unaware of the attack from the *Alcide*; but a solid phalanx of Frenchmen was forming swiftly in the centre of the deck, mustered frantically by a tall young officer in a gold baldric.

Cursing, shouting, thrusting, British seamen were gaining footing on deck. Smith raised sword and voice together.

"Boarding-party! Follow! Follow!"

Then he leaped across the blood-puddled deck, heading not for the phalanx of soldiers—who were now presenting muskets and firing with some appearance of discipline—but for the other side of the deck. After him thudded the bare feet of his men. They gained the bulwarks, cutting and slashing among those who still lingered there. The marksmen at the rail broke and fled along the deck at the onset. The musketry was getting hotter from the solid white-coated mass in the centre. A seaman beside him fell—and simultaneously there was a burst of cheering from the far side of the deck. Cragg and his party were up.

"Into them, lads!"

The affair did not last long. Taken between two bands of cheering fighting-men armed with the cutlass, the French—untried soldiers almost to a man—ran or were cut down or beaten over the head with their own muskets. Quite suddenly resistance ceased. Distant cheering came from the *Arrogant*.

"The 74's struck, sir!" panted the boatswain at Smith's side.

The lieutenant, flushed and dishevelled, nodded. His eye fell on the group of ship's officers standing irresolute on the poop.

"Prisoners, Cragg. Haul down her colours."

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"Aye aye, sir." Cragg jerked a thumb. "Better look arter *him*, sir!"

Smith turned. With his back to the mainmast and his arms folded, stood the young officer who had rallied the Frenchmen. He was hatless and his dark features scowled beneath a powdered wig very much awry. At his feet lay a broken sword.

"*Rendez-vous, Monsieur!*" the lieutenant sang out.

"*Venez me prendre!*" snarled the other.

"Damme, I will!"

Smith flung down his sword and advanced bare-handed. The Frenchman unfolded his arms with a sudden gesture. The pistol in his hand exploded, sending its bullet humming past Smith's ear and stinging his face with powder-grains.

"Monsieur Frog," said Smith, between his teeth, "I am the mildest of men, but—there's for you!"

His fist took the Frenchman on the point of the jaw and the young man dropped without a groan. The lieutenant picked up his sword.

Half an hour later, in Captain Peel's cabin, Lieutenant Smith was making his report. The captain listened gravely, his sardonic features expressionless. When it was finished he nodded.

"Very good, Mr. Smith. I shall mention your conduct to the Admiral." He paused. "One point. I do not wish to criticize unduly, but among our prisoners is an officer of King Louis' Guards, one De Guichen, who—you spoke?"

"No, sir," replied Lieutenant Smith, who had checked an exclamation on recognizing the name of Isabelle's betrothed.

"I understand," continued the captain, "that observing this officer to be without a sword, you threw aside your own weapon and knocked him down, narrowly escaping a pistol-shot. Is this so?"

"Yes, sir."

Captain Peel leaned back in his chair and surveyed the youthful face of his lieutenant.

"I'd have you remember, Mr. Smith, that we are not living in the days of chivalry. This is the eighteenth century. Do you consider it a part of your duty to behave like a damned knight-errant, sir?"

Lieutenant Smith, very erect and slightly defiant, said nothing.

"Mr. Smith," said Captain Peel, "you're a fool."

"Yes, sir," said Lieutenant Smith.

Under black peaks the harbour of Castries was crimson with reflected sunset. The fleet of Admiral Rodney lay at anchor, spars and hulls mirrored in the wine-red water. Five great line-of-battle

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ships lay captive in the midst, among them the French flagship *Ville de Paris*, dismasted and battered. From the ships the busy racket of mallet, saw, and axe rose in the still evening air. The squeal of block and tackle and the faint strains of a hauling chanty floated across the harbour to the frigate *Alcide*, where Lieutenant Smith, who had the second dog-watch, paced with restless energy up and down the quarterdeck.

Alcide had been two days in port, but there had been no shore leave for Lieutenant Smith. There had been much to do: repairs, painting, revictualling, the making out of reports and the disposing of dead and wounded. The prisoners were for the most part under hatches in the captured ships, but the officers—apart from the French admiral, who was the guest, on parole, of the Governor—had been taken ashore and were under guard in the big warehouses on the quay. There, reflected Lieutenant Smith with considerable satisfaction, was M. le Capitaine de Guichen, who had the empty honour of being betrothed to Isabelle Laroche; a betrothal soon to become invalid by reason of Isabelle's marriage to a far more worthy young gentleman.

For Mademoiselle Laroche had received the letter he had addressed to her immediately on his arrival, a confident and impassioned epistle avowing his intention of visiting her as soon as his duty permitted and carrying her off at the earliest opportunity thereafter: and she had sent a reply, which he had received only this morning. He checked his pacing and pulled Isabelle's note from his pocket:

Monsieur my lover,

Do not be angry, I beg. It was not my fault that my father caught me reading your letter. He has locked me in my room. But I shall escape—it is planned. Marie, my woman, will help me. And I will come away with you, on the night of the 17th. Do not try to see me before then. You must find a boat and bring it at midnight to the little bay south of the quay, the bay with the pointed rock. It must not be one of your ship's boats—I will tell you why later. You must be very careful, my dear, and tell no one at all of your purpose. This is important. I will explain when we are safe. At midnight on the 17th—Marie will come with me. Do not fail me.

Your Isabelle.

Lieutenant Smith pressed his lips to the letter and restored it to his pocket. It was fortunate, he meditated, that he would be free to go ashore at the end of his watch. He would not fail her. For tonight was the night of the 17th.

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There would be, he perceived, some difficulties to overcome—not in the actual evasion but afterwards. He had intended to reveal his intentions to his captain before bringing Isabelle on board; Peel, for all his sarcastic manner, would, he thought, be sympathetic. Now he was to bring two women on board unannounced, and explanations were going to be awkward. None the less, he had little doubt of carrying his point. Then Isabelle and he would be married—Isabelle of the dark eyes and the slender waist—Isabelle . . .

The light faded through orange to green and dusk-purple. A vast moon rose out of the sea. Lieutenant Thurlow, coming on deck with his arm in a sling, found his junior officer still pacing up and down.

"Right, Smithy—I'll take over," said he. "You for the shore? Quartermaster! Call the boat's crew."

Over the velvety blackness of the water crept the *Alcide*'s boat, to land Lieutenant Smith at the quay and be dismissed. Smith strode along the rough paving of the quay beside the long low shapes of the warehouses. Dim lanterns burned at intervals, and under each lantern a marine sentry with a musket clicked smartly to attention as the unmistakable blue uniform coat and white breeches came into the orange circle of lamplight. A low hum, the voices of the imprisoned French officers naval and military, came from inside the sheds. No boats lay alongside the quays; the Carib fishing-boats had been strictly banished to the forested cove beyond the quays where the Caribs had their village, Admiral Rodney deeming it wise to keep the natives clear of his temporary prisons. To find his boat, then, Smith had to thread a quarter of a mile of glimmering path between the boles of palm trees. As he strode through the chequered moonlight he meditated, not without slight dissatisfaction, on Isabelle's arrangements.

In his view, it was hardly the part of an imprisoned maiden to make her own plans for escape; that should have been left to the rescuer, the knight-errant. It would have annoyed Perseus, he considered, if Andromeda had written instructing him in the use of the Gorgon's head and the way to acquire winged sandals. However, she had been clear and sensible for a girl, though he would not in any case have used one of the frigate's boats for this escape. The king's property was not for an officer's private affairs, and Lieutenant Smith intended to keep himself on the right side of the law in that at least.

Through the trees shone the dull glow of a fire, close to the shoreward end of a rickety wooden jetty. Smith diverged from his path and went down towards the fire. Half a dozen Caribs were seated round it drawing at rank cigars. Moonlight glinted

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bluely on the whites of their eyes as they stared up at him in manifest amazement.

"Boat," he said. "*Felucca, bateau.*"

One of the Caribs nodded and grinned.

"*De l'argent, m'sieu'?*"

Smith opened his hand, displaying the gold coins in it.

The Carib's boat was an unwieldy craft with a stumpy mast. Her owner, grinning, pointed to the bow thwart; on which Smith took his seat, and cast off the coir lines that held her to the jetty.

Smith made his oarsmen keep well in towards the quay; he was bound to be seen, and there was no need for concealment. Sure enough, a marine sentry stepped forward and challenged sharply. Smith stood up.

"Lieutenant Sidney Smith, frigate *Alcide*," he called. "Out for a little night-fishing."

The marine, a dim figure on the quayside, lowered his musket.

"Beg pardon, sir. Orders to be hextra careful. One o' the prisoners got away this afternoon."

The boat moved slowly on, a dream craft on a moonlit sea of romance. True, it stank vilely of stale fish, but your knight-errant nearing the achievement of his quest and his lady, has a mind above such crudities. Lieutenant Smith was able to see himself in that character without difficulty. Had he not braved steel and bullet and round-shot to win back to the rescue of his love? Was not the boarding of the *Impérieuse*, the brilliant move by which he had placed the French soldiers between two fires, a sufficiently glorious feat to lay before her? Peel had mentioned him in his dispatch to the Admiral; that might well mean promotion, perhaps a command. In a year or two—who could say?—he might have his captaincy. And after that—"Sir William Sidney Smith and Lady Sidney Smith?" . . . It sounded well enough. And Isabelle—he lost himself in moonlight dreams of Isabelle.

The Carib paused in his rhythmic rowing and grunted inquiringly. Smith stood up and conned the steep line of the shore. Ahead he could see a rocky promontory whose end was a triangular pinnacle, which he recognized; he had scanned it often enough through his glass during the afternoon—Isabelle's "bay with the pointed rock."

He signed to the Carib to pull round the point into the bay, and to do it quietly.

The boat nosed into a gap between two rocks. The Carib curled himself on some matting in the stern and presently slept. Lieutenant Smith set himself to watch and wait.

The night was still and warm, heavy with the fragrance of

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orange-blossom. Only the slightest movement troubled the black water, setting the broad moon-path gently a-quiver and flinging tiny waves to lap sleepily against the rocks. From the steep bushes that overhung the boat came a steady hum of insects; faint and mellow across the water floated the chime of a ship's bell—six bells in the first watch. He had another hour to wait.

An hour; but it seemed at least three before a rustle of bushes on the hill above told of someone approaching. Smith roused the Carib and leapt ashore, alert, straining his ears. He heard a low excited voice—it was she! A glimmer of white through the leaves, a quick step, and she almost fell into his arms.

"My love!" He crushed her to him, felt her cheek hot under his lips.

She pushed him away urgently.

"We must be quick!" she whispered. "My things—into the boat, please!"

Behind her a gaunt female figure, cloaked and hooded, stepped down to the rocks with a bundle in each hand.

"Monsieur will take them, Marie," said Isabelle in French, her voice trembling with excitement.

Smith flung the bundles to the boatman and turned to catch the girl in his arms.

He swung Isabelle over the gunwale and set her down in the bows. Then he turned to give a hand to the woman.

He had just time, before the blow fell, to note that the hood had fallen back and the face beneath was one he had seen before. After that there was a long interval of utter blackness.

In Captain Peel's cabin there was very nearly six feet of head-room, an unusual feature of even a captain's cabin on board a frigate. This was fortunate, because Lieutenant Sidney Smith's situation impelled him to stand very stiff and straight, with his chin in the air and his brown curls all but brushing the oak of the deckhead. He had finished speaking sixty seconds before, but Captain Peel, flung back in his chair with his hands gripping the edge of the table before him, had so far made no comment on the story he had listened to. He merely stared. When at last he spoke he appeared to control his voice with difficulty; it trembled slightly, but—one imagines—not with anger.

"Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Smith," he said incredulously, "that instead of eloping with this damsel of yours you—you connived at the escape of Captain de Guichen?"

Lieutenant Smith, looking as grim as he could with three inches of plaster stuck across his forehead, stared fixedly at a hanging lantern two feet above the captain's head.

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" I conceived it my duty to tell you, sir," he replied through set teeth.

" You were correct, sir. It is, as I conceive, my duty to report the whole matter to the Admiral." The captain glared at him, lowered his eyes hurriedly, and blew his nose with a large spotted handkerchief. " You realize, I take it," he resumed when he had recovered, " that you'll be the laughing-stock of the Fleet ? "

Lieutenant Smith said nothing. He did indeed realize that.

" However," Peel continued gravely, " I don't intend to do my duty. I am, in fact, doubtful whether it is desirable. You are no longer under my command, Mr. Smith. The Admiral has been pleased to appoint you to the command of the *Fury* sloop."

The lieutenant's set features did not relax, but his eyes shifted to the captain's face. Peel was smiling.

" As to this tale of yours," he said, " it won't go any further—though I rob myself of the best after-dinner yarn in the Service. You may consider," he added sardonically, " that you've paid a very small price for some invaluable knowledge of the female sex."

He stood up and reached a long arm to his lieutenant's shoulder.

" Take my advice, my boy," he said, " and rid your mind of this knight-errant twaddle. It's outmoded."

Lieutenant Smith looked as though he had not heard.

" Mr. Smith, you're a damned fool," said Captain Peel.

" Yes, sir," said Lieutenant Smith.

☆ ***But there is no discouraging the knight-errant in Mr. Smith. Next month we find him, disguised as an Arab, setting out on a one-man expedition to the Barbary Coast. The Emperor of Morocco may or may not have designs on Gibraltar, but Lieutenant—or rather Captain—Smith has heard the rumour, and he is hot on the trail!***

* * *

THE WHOLE HOG

Said an Army officer, of the one above him: " His motto is, 'Why be disagreeable, when with a little effort you can be impossible?'"

DOUGLAS WOODRUFF, *Still Talking At Random*

It seldom pays to be rude. It never pays to be only half rude.

NORMAN DOUGLAS, *An Almanac*

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PORTRAIT OF EVE

I hate women as a race. I think we are demons

MRS. LYNN LINTON, *The Girl of the Period*, 1898

She was not young, but there was a merriness in the seesaw of her hips, and her breasts rubbed and nudged against her peach-coloured blouse in such a coaxing way. She wore a fringed chamois skirt and knee-high cowboy boots, which was a mistake, for you felt that her legs, if fully exposed, would have been the best part. She leaned on the car door. Her eyelids drooped as though the lashes weighed intolerably ; with the tip of her tongue she wettened her very red lips. " Good morning, fellows," she said, and it was a dragging slow-fuse voice. TRUMAN CAPOTE, *The Grass Harp*

The More The Pity

Are women wise ? Not wise, but they be witty ;
Are women witty ? Yea, the more the pity ;
They are so witty, and in wit so wily,
That ye be ne'er so wise, they will beguile ye.

Are women fools ? Not fools but fondlings, many.
Can women fond be faithful unto any ?
When snow-white swans do turn to colour sable,
Then women fond will be both firm and stable.

Author Unknown, Rapsody against Women, 1602

Wonderful To Relate !

Henry of Wied was an exceeding rich, powerful, and famous knight, a courtier to Henry, Duke of Saxony . . . He had a wife whom he loved well ; and, as they talked one day of the fault of Eve, she began, as is the wont of women, to curse and condemn her for inconstancy of mind, because for a mere apple's sake, to the satisfaction of her gluttony, she had subjected the whole human race to such pains and miseries.

Her husband made answer, " Condemn her not ; thou, perchance, in such a temptation wouldst have done the same. I will give thee a command which is less than Eve's yet even for love of me thou shalt not be able to keep it." " What is that command ? " said she ; and he replied : " That, on the day whereon thou hast

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gone to bath, thou shouldst never walk barefoot through the slough in the midst of our courtyard . . ."

Now that slough was a foul and stinking swamp, drained together from the filth of the whole court: wherefore she smiled and shuddered inly at the idea of transgressing his command. Then Sir Henry added: "I will that we also add a penalty. If thou obeyest, thou shalt receive from me forty marks of silver; if not, thou shalt pay me a like sum" . . . He therefore, without her knowledge, set men to watch secretly over this slough.

Wonderful to relate! from that time forward this lady, honourable and clean as she was, could never go through that courtyard without looking back at the aforesaid slough: and, as often as she bathed, so often was she grievously tempted to walk therein. One day, therefore, as she went forth from her bath, she said to her waiting-maid, "I must needs walk through that slough or die!" and forthwith, girding up her robe and looking around and seeing no man, she sent away the maiden who followed her, and plunged up to her knees into that stinking water, wherein she walked backwards and forwards until she had utterly satisfied her desire.

The tale was forthwith told to her husband, who rejoiced and said as soon as he saw her: "How goeth it, lady? Hast thou bathed well today?" "Yea!" replied she. Whereupon he added, "In thy bath, or in the slough?" At this word she was troubled and held her peace . . . Then said he, "Where, my lady, is your constancy, your obedience and your boasting? You have been less delicately tempted than Eve: you are fallen more shamefully. Give me therefore that you owe!" And since she had not wherewithal to pay him, he took all her precious vestments and gave them to divers other persons, suffering her to be sore tormented for a while.

CAESARIUS OF HEISTERBACH, *Dialogue, quoted by G. G. Coulton in "Life in the Middle Ages"*

Equilibrium

She should be allowed her passions
So they were but used as fashions:
Sometimes froward and then frowning,
Sometimes sickish and then swowning,
Every fit with change still crowning.
Purely jealous I would have her,
Then only constant when I crave her,
'Tis a virtue would not save her!
Thus, nor her delicates would cloy me
Nor her peevishness annoy me.

BEN JONSON

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The Strenuous Life

I see some women who are all the time occupied with applying washes to their hair to give it a blond colour . . .

TERTULLIAN, *De Cultu Feminarum*

There Was—Once . . .

There was once (said Reginald) a woman who told the truth. Not all at once, of course, but the habit grew upon her gradually, like lichen on an apparently healthy tree. She had no children—otherwise it might have been different.

It began with little things, for no particular reason except that her life was a rather empty one, and it is so easy to slip into the habit of telling the truth in little matters. And then it became difficult to draw the line at more important things, until at last she took to telling the truth about her age; she said she was forty-two and five months—by that time, you see, she was veracious even to months. It may have been pleasing to the angels, but her elder sister was not gratified . . .

The friends of the woman tried to dissuade her from over-indulgence in the practice, but she said she was wedded to the truth; whereupon it was remarked that it was scarcely logical to be so much together in public . . . And after a while her friends began to thin out in patches . . .

It was unfortunate, everyone agreed, that she had no family; with a child or two in the house, there is an unconscious check upon too free an indulgence in the truth . . . Little by little she felt she was becoming a slave to what had once been merely an idle propensity; and one day she knew.

"SAKI", *Reginald*

In Confidence

We wommen have, if that I shal nat lye,
In this matere a queynte fantasye;
Whatever thyng we may nat lightly have,
Therafter wil we crie al day and crave.
Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we;
Presse on us faste, and thanne wil we fle . . .

By God! if wommen hadde writen stories,
As clerkes have withinne their oratories,
They wolde have writen of men moore wikkednesse
Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*

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ASLEEP IN ARMAGEDDON

It was a beautiful world — until the night and the voices padded in on soft feet

by RAY BRADBURY

YOU don't want death and you don't expect death. Something goes wrong, your rocket tilts in space, a planetoid jumps up, blackness, movement, hands over the eyes, a violent pulling back of available power in the fore-jets, the crash . . .

The darkness. In the darkness, the senseless pain. In the pain, the nightmare.

He was not unconscious.

Your name? asked hidden voices. "Sale," he replied in whirling nausea. "Leonard Sale." *Occupation*, cried the voices. "Spaceman!" he cried, alone in the night. *Welcome*, said the voices. *Welcome, welcome.* They faded.

He stood up in the wreckage of his ship. It lay like a folded, tattered garment around him.

The sun rose and it was morning.

Sale pried himself out of the small airlock and stood breathing the atmosphere. Luck. Sheer luck. The air was breathable. An instant's checking showed him that he had two months' supply of food with him. Fine, fine! And this—he fingered at the wreckage. Miracle of miracles! The radio was intact.

He stuttered out the message on the sending key. CRASHED ON PLANETOID 787. SALE. SEND HELP. SALE. SEND HELP.

The reply came instantly: HELLO, SALE. THIS IS ADDAMS IN MARSPORT. SENDING RESCUE SHIP LOGARITHM. WILL ARRIVE PLANETOID 787 IN SIX DAYS. HANG ON.

Sale did a little dance.

It was as simple as that. One crashed. One had food. One radioed for help. Help came. La! He clapped his hands.

The sun rose and was warm. He felt no sense of mortality. Six days would be no time at all. He would eat, he would sleep. He glanced at his surroundings. No dangerous animals; a tolerable oxygen supply. What more could one ask? Beans and bacon, was the answer. The happy smell of breakfast filled the air.

After breakfast he smoked a cigarette slowly, deeply, blowing out. He nodded contentedly. What a life! Not a scratch on him. Luck. Sheer luck.

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His head nodded. Sleep, he thought.

Good idea. Forty winks. Plenty of time to sleep, take it easy. Six whole long, luxurious days of idling and philosophizing. Sleep.

He stretched himself out, tucked his arm under his head, and shut his eyes.

Insanity came in to take him. The voices whispered.

Sleep, yes, sleep, said the voices. *Ah, sleep, sleep.*

He opened his eyes. The voices stopped. Everything was normal. He shrugged. He shut his eyes casually, fitfully. He settled his long body.

Eeeeeeeee, sang the voices, far away.

Ahhhhhhhh, sang the voices.

Sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep, sang the voices.

Die, die, die, die, die, sang the voices.

Ooooooooo, cried the voices.

MMMmmmmmm, a bee ran through his brain.

He sat up. He shook his head. He put his hands to his ears. He blinked at the crashed ship. Hard metal. He felt the solid rock under his fingers. He saw the real sun warming the blue sky.

Let's try sleeping on our back, he thought. He adjusted himself, lying back down. His watch ticked on his wrist. The blood burned in his veins.

Sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep, sang the voices.

Ohhhhhhhh, sang the voices.

Ahhhhhhhh, sang the voices.

Die, die, die, die, die. Sleep, sleep, die, sleep, die, sleep, die! Oohhh. Ahhhh. Eeeeeee!

Blood tapped in his ears. The sound of the wind rising.

Mine, mine, said a voice. *Mine, mine, he's mine!*

No, mine, mine, said another voice. *No, mine, mine; he's mine!*

No, ours, ours, sang ten voices. *Ours, ours, he's ours!*

His fingers twitched. His jaws spasmed. His eyelids jerked.

At last, at last, sang a high voice. *Now, now. The long time, the waiting. Over, over,* sang the high voice. *Over, over at last!*

It was like being undersea. Green songs, green visions, green time. Bubbled voices drowning in deep liquors of sea tide. Far away choruses chanting senseless rhymes. Leonard Sale stirred in agony.

Mine, mine, cried a loud voice. *Mine, mine!* shrieked another. *Ours, ours!* shrieked the chorus.

The din of metal, the crash of sword, the conflict, the battle, the fight, the war. All of it exploding, his mind fiercely torn apart!

Eeeeeeee!

He leaped up, screaming. The landscape melted and flowed.

A voice said, "I am Tylle of Rathalar. Proud Tylle, Tylle of

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the Blood Mound and the Death Drum. Tylle of Rathalar, Killer of Men!"

Another spoke, "I am Iorr of Wendillo, Wise Iorr, Destroyer of Infidels!"

The chorus chanted, *And we the warriors, we the steel, we the warriors, we the red blood rushing, the red blood falling, the red blood steaming in the sun—*

Leonard Sale staggered under the burden. "Go away!" he cried. "Leave me, in God's name, leave me!"

Eeeeeeeee, shrieked the high sound of steel hot on steel.

Silence. He stood with the sweat boiling out of him. He was trembling so violently he could not stand. Insane, he thought. Absolutely insane. Raving insane. Insane.

He jerked the food kit open, did something to a chemical packet. Hot coffee was ready in an instant. He mouthed it, spilled gushes of it down his shirt. He shivered. He sucked in raw gulps of breath.

Let's be logical, he thought, sitting down heavily. The coffee seared his tongue. No record of insanity in the family for two hundred years. All healthy, well balanced. No reason for insanity now. Shock? Silly. No shock. I'm to be rescued in six days. No shock to that. No danger. Just an ordinary planetoid. Ordinary, ordinary place. No reason for insanity. I'm sane.

Oh? cried a small metal voice within. An echo. Fading.

"Yes!" he cried, beating his fists together. "Sane!"

Hahahahahahahahaha. Somewhere a vanishing laughter.

He whirled about. "Shut up, you!" he cried.

We didn't say anything, said the mountains. *We didn't say anything*, said the sky. *We didn't say anything*, said the wreckage.

"All right, then," he said, swaying. "See that you don't."

Everything was normal.

The pebbles were getting hot. The sky was big and blue. He looked at his fingers and saw the way the sun burned on every black hair. He looked at his boots and the dust on them. Suddenly he felt very happy because he made a decision. I won't go to sleep, he thought. I'm having nightmares, so why sleep? There's your solution.

He made a routine. From nine o'clock in the morning, which was this minute, until twelve, he would walk around and see the planetoid. He would write on a pad with a yellow pencil everything he saw. Then he would sit down and open a tin of oily sardines and some tinned fresh bread with good butter on it. From twelve-thirty until four he would read nine chapters of *War and Peace*. He took the book from the wreckage and laid it where he might find it later. There was a book of T. S. Eliot's poetry, too. That might be nice.

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Supper would come at five-thirty, and then from six until ten he would listen to the radio from Earth. There would be a couple of bad comedians telling jokes, and a bad singer singing some song, and the latest news flashes, signing off at midnight with the U.N. anthem.

After that? He felt sick.

I'll play solitaire until dawn, he thought. I'll sit up and drink hot black coffee and play solitaire, no cheating, until sunrise.

Ho, ho, he thought.

"What did you say?" he asked himself.

"I said 'Ha, ha'," he replied. "*Some* time you'll have to sleep."

"I'm wide awake," he said.

"Liar," he retorted, enjoying the conversation.

"I feel fine," he said.

"Hypocrite," he replied.

"I'm not afraid of the night, or sleep, or anything," he said.

"*Very* funny," he said.

He felt bad. He wanted to sleep. And the fact that he was afraid of sleep made him want to lie down all the more and shut his eyes and curl up. "Comfy-cozy?" asked his ironic censor.

"I'll just walk and look at the rocks and the geological formations and think how good it is to be alive," he said.

You'll go on, he thought, maybe one day, maybe one night, but what about the next night, and the next, and the *next?* Can you stay awake *all* that time, for six nights? Until the rescue ship comes? Are you *that* good, *that* strong?

The answer was no.

What are you afraid of? I don't know. Those voices. Those sounds. But they can't hurt you, can they?

They *might.* You've got to face them some time. Must I? Brace up to it, old man. Chin up, and all that rot.

He sat down on the hard ground. He felt very much like crying. He felt as if life were over and he was entering new and unknown territory. It was such a deceiving day, with the sun warm; physically, he felt able and well; one might fish on such a day as this, or pick flowers, or kiss a woman, or anything. But in the midst of a lovely day, what did one get?

Death.

Well, hardly *that.*

Death, he insisted. He lay down and closed his eyes.

All right, he thought, if you *are* death, come get me. I want to know what all this damned nonsense is about.

Death came.

Eeeeeeeee, said a voice.

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" Yes, I know," said Leonard Sale, lying there. " But what else ? "

Ahhhhhhhh, said a voice.

" I know that, also," said Leonard Sale irritably. He turned cold. His mouth hung open wildly.

" I am Tylle of Rathalar, Killer of Men ! "

" I am Iorr of Wendillo, Destroyer of Infidels ! "

" What is this place ? " asked Leonard Sale, struggling against horror.

" Once a mighty planet ! " said Tylle of Rathalar.

" Once a place of battles ! " said Iorr of Wendillo.

" Now dead," said Tylle.

" Now silent," said Iorr.

" Until *you* came," said Tylle.

" To give us life again," said Iorr.

" You're dead," insisted Leonard Sale, flesh writhing. " You're nothing but empty wind."

" We live, through you."

" And fight, through *you !* "

So that's it, thought Leonard Sale. I'm to be a battleground, am I ? " Are you friends ? "

" Enemies ! " cried Iorr.

" Foul enemies ! " cried Tylle.

Leonard smiled a rictal smile. He felt ghastly. " How long have you waited ? " he demanded.

" How long is *time ?* "

" Ten thousand years ? "

" Perhaps."

" Ten million years ? "

" Perhaps."

" What are you ? Thoughts, spirits, ghosts ? " he asked.

" All of those, and more."

" Intelligences ? "

" Precisely."

" How did you survive ? "

Eeeeeeee, sang the chorus, far away.

Ahhhhhhhh, sang another army, waiting to fight.

" Once upon a time, this was fertile land, a rich planet. And there were two nations, strong nations, led by two strong men. I, Iorr. And he, that one who calls himself Tylle. And the planet declined and gave way to nothingness. The peoples and the armies languished in the midst of a great war which had lasted five thousand years. We lived long lives and loved long loves, drank much, slept much, fought much. And when the planet died, our bodies withered, and only in time, and with much science, did we survive."

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" Survive," wondered Leonard Sale. " But there is nothing of you ! "

" Our *minds*, fool, our *minds !* What is a body without a mind ? "

" What is a mind without a *body ?* " laughed Leonard Sale. " I've got you there. Admit it, I've *got* you ! "

" True," said the cruel voice. " One is useless lacking the other. But survival is survival even when unconscious. The minds of our nations, through science, through wonder, survived."

" But without senses, lacking eyes, ears, lacking touch, smell, and the rest ? "

" Lacking all those, yes. We were vapours merely. For a long time. Until today."

" And now I am here," thought Leonard Sale.

" You are here," said the voice. " To give substance to our mentalities. To give us our needed body."

" I'm only one," thought Sale.

" Nevertheless, you are of use."

" I'm an individual," thought Sale. " I resent your intrusion."

" He resents our intrusion ! Did you hear him, Iorr ? He resents ! "

" Be careful," warned Sale. " I'll blink my eyes and you'll be gone, phantoms ! I'll wake up and rub you out ! "

" But you'll have to sleep again *some* time ! " cried Iorr. " And when you do, we'll be here, waiting, waiting, waiting. For you."

" What do you want ? "

" Solidity. Mass. Sensation again."

" You can't *both* have it."

" We'll fight that out between us."

A hot clamp twisted his skull. It was as if a spike had been thrust and beaten down between the bivalvular halves of his brain.

Now it was terribly clear. Horribly, magnificently clear. He was their universe. The world of his thoughts, his brain, his skull, divided into two camps, that of Iorr, that of Tylle. They were *using* him !

Pennants flung up on a pink mind sky ! Brass shields caught the sun. Grey animals shifted and came rushing in, bristling tides of sword and plume and trumpet.

Ten thousand men hurtled across the small hidden stage. Ten thousand men floated on the shellacked inner ball of his eye. Ten thousand javelins hissed between the small bone hulls of his head. Ten thousand jewelled guns exploded. Ten thousand voices chanted in his ears.

Now his body was riven and extended, shaken and rolled, he was screaming, writhing, the plates of his skull threatened to burst asunder. The gabbling, the shrilling, as, across bone plains of mind

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and continent of inner marrow, through gullies of vein, down hills of artery, over rivers of melancholy, came armies and armies, one army, two armies, swords flashed in the sun, bearing down upon one another, fifty thousand minds snatching, scrabbling, cutting at him, demanding, using. In a moment, the hard collision, one army on another, the rush, the blood, the sound, the fury, the death, the insanity!

Like cymbals, the armies struck!

He leaped up, raving. He ran across the desert. He ran and ran and did not stop running.

He sat down and cried. He sobbed until his lungs ached. He cried very hard and long. Tears ran down his cheeks and into his upraised, trembling fingers. "God, God, help me, oh, God, help me," he said.

All was normal again.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. The rocks were baked by the sun. He managed, after a time, to cook himself a few hot biscuits, which he ate with strawberry jam. He wiped his stained fingers on his shirt, blindly, trying not to think.

At least I know what I'm up against, he thought. Oh, Lord, what a world. What an innocent-looking world, and what a monster it really is. It's good no one ever explored it before. Or *did* they? He shook his aching head. Pity them, who ever crashed here before, if any ever did. Warm sun, hard rocks, not a sign of hostility. A lovely world.

Until you shut your eyes and relaxed your mind.

And the night and the voices and the insanity and the death padded in on soft feet.

"I'm all right now, though," he said proudly. "Look at that." He displayed his hand. By a supreme effort of will, it was no longer shaking. "I'll show you who in hell's ruler here," he announced to the innocent sky. "*I* am." He tapped his chest.

To think that *thought* could live that long! A million years, perhaps, all these thoughts of death and disorder and conquest, lingering in the innocent but poisonous air of the planet, waiting for a real man to give them a channel through which they might issue again in all their senseless virulence.

Now that he was feeling better, it was all silly. All I have to do, he thought, is stay awake six nights. They won't bother me that way. When I'm awake, I'm dominant. I'm stronger than those crazy monarchs and their silly tribes of sword flingers and shield bearers and horn blowers. I'll stay awake.

But *can* you? he wondered. Six whole nights? Awake?

There's coffee and medicine and books and cards.

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But I'm tired *now*, so tired, he thought. Can I hold out?

Well, if not . . . There's always the gun.

Where will these silly monarchs be if you put a bullet through their stage? All the world's a stage? No. *You*, Leonard Sale, are the small stage. And they the players. And what if you put a bullet through the wings, tearing down scenes, destroying curtains! Destroy the stage, the players, all, if they aren't careful!

First of all he must radio through to Marsport again. If there was any way they could rush the rescue ship sooner, then maybe he could hang on. Anyway, he must warn them what sort of planet this was, this so innocent-seeming spot of nightmare and fever vision—

He tapped on the radio key for a minute. His mouth tightened. The radio was dead.

It had sent through the proper rescue message, received a reply, and then extinguished itself.

The proper touch of irony, he thought. There was only one thing to do. Draw a plan.

This he did. He got a yellow pencil and delineated his six-day plan of escape.

Tonight, he wrote, *read six more chapters of* War and Peace. *At four in the morning have hot black coffee. At four-fifteen take cards from pack and play ten games of solitaire. This should take until six-thirty when—more coffee. At seven o'clock, listen to early morning programmes from Earth, if the receiving equipment on the radio works at all. Does it?*

He tried the radio receiver. It was dead.

Well, he wrote, *from seven o'clock until eight, sing all the songs you remember, make your own entertainment. From eight until nine think about Helen King. Remember Helen. On second thoughts, think about Helen right now.*

He marked that out with his pencil.

The rest of the days were set down in minute detail.

He checked the medical kit. There were several packets of tablets that would keep you awake. One tablet an hour every hour for six days. He felt quite confident.

" Here's mud in your evil eye, Iorr, Tylle! "

He swallowed one of the stay-awake tablets with a scalding mouthful of black coffee.

Well, with one thing and another, it was Tolstoi, gin rummy, coffee, tablets, walking, more Tolstoi, more gin rummy, more solitaire. The first day passed, as did the second and the third.

On the fourth day he lay quietly in the shade of a rock, counting to a thousand by fives, then by tens, to keep his mind occupied and

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awake. His eyes were so tired he had to bathe them frequently in cool water. He couldn't read, he was bothered with splitting headaches. He was so exhausted he couldn't move. He was numb with medicine. He resembled a waxen dummy, stuffed with things to preserve him in a state of horrified wakefulness. His eyes were glass, his tongue a rusted pike, his fingers felt as if they were gloved in needles and fur.

He followed the hand of his watch. One second less to wait, he thought. Two seconds, three seconds, four, five, ten, thirty seconds. A whole minute. Now an hour less time to wait. Oh, ship, hurry on thy appointed round!

He began to laugh softly.

What would happen if he just gave up, drifted off to sleep? Sleep, ah, sleep; perchance to dream. All the world a stage . . . What if he gave up the unequal struggle, lapsed down?

Eeeeeeeee, the high, shrill warning sound of battle metal.

He shivered. His tongue moved in his dry, burry mouth.

Iorr and Tylle would battle out their ancient battle.

Leonard Sale would become quite insane.

And whichever won the battle would take this ruin of an insane man, the shaking, laughing, wild body, and wander it across the face of this world for ten, twenty years, occupying it, striding in it, pompous, holding court, making grand gestures, ordering heads severed, calling on inward unseen dancing girls.

When the rescue ship arrived it would find nothing. Sale would be hidden somewhere by a triumphant army in his head. Hidden in some cleft rock, placed there like a nest for Iorr to lie upon in evil occupation.

The thought of it almost broke him in half.

Twenty years of insanity. Twenty years of torture, doing what you don't want to do. Twenty years of wars raging and being split apart, twenty years of nausea and trembling.

His head sank down between his knees. His eyes snapped and cracked and made soft noises. His eardrum popped tiredly.

Sleep, sleep, sang soft sea voices.

"I'll—I'll make a proposition with you. Listen," thought Leonard Sale. "You, Iorr, you, too, Tylle! Iorr, you, you, too, Tylle! Iorr, you can occupy me on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Tylle, you can take me over on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Saturdays. Thursday is maid's night out. What'll you say, is it a *bargain*, Iorr, Tylle?"

No, said a voice.

No, said another.

"Greedy, both of you, greedy!" complained Sale.

He slept.

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He *was* Iorr, jewelled rings on his hands. He arose beside his rocket and held out his fingers, commanding blind armies. He was Iorr, ancient ruler of jewelled warriors.

He *was* Tylle, lover of women, killer of dogs!

With some hidden bit of awareness, his hand crept to the holster at his hip. The sleeping hand withdrew the gun there. The hand lifted, the gun pointed.

The armies of Tylle and Iorr gave battle.

The gun exploded.

The bullet tore across Sale's forehead, wakening him.

He stayed awake for another six hours, getting over his latest siege. He knew it to be hopeless now. He washed and bandaged the wound he had given himself. He wished he had aimed straighter and it was all over. He watched the sky. Two more days. Two more. Come on, ship, come on. He was heavy with sleeplessness.

No use. At the end of six hours he was raving badly. He took the gun up and put it down and took it up again, put it against his head, tightened his hand on the trigger, changed his mind, looked at the sky again.

Night settled. He tried to read, threw the book away. He tore it up and burned it, just to have something to do.

So tired. In another hour, he decided. If nothing happens, I'll kill myself. This is for certain now. I'll *do* it, this time.

He got the gun ready and laid it on the ground next to himself. He was very calm now, though tired. It would be over and done. He would be dead.

He watched the minute hand of his watch. One minute, five minutes, twenty-five minutes.

The flame appeared on the sky.

It was so unbelievable he started to cry. "A rocket," he said, standing up. "A rocket!" he cried, rubbing his eyes. He ran forward.

The flame brightened, grew, came down.

He waved frantically, running forward, leaving his gun, his supplies, everything behind. "You *see* that, Iorr, Tylle! You savages, you monsters, I beat you! I *won!* They're coming to rescue me now! I've won, damn you." He laughed harshly at the rocks and the sky and the backs of his hands.

The rocket landed. Leonard Sale stood swaying, waiting for the door to slide open. "Good-bye, Iorr, good-bye, Tylle!" he shouted in triumph, grinning, eyes hot.

Eeeee, sang a diminishing roar in time.

Ahhhhh, voices faded.

The rocket flipped wide its airlock. Two men jumped out.

"Sale?" they called. "We're Ship ACDN13. Intercepted

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your SOS and decided to pick you up ourselves. The Marsport ship won't get through until day after tomorrow. We want a spot of rest ourselves. Thought it'd be good to spend the night here, pick you up, and go on."

"No," said Sale, face melting with terror. "No spend night—"

He couldn't talk. He fell to the ground.

"Quick," said a voice in the bleary vortex over him. "Give him a shot of food liquid, another of sedative. He needs sustenance and rest."

"No rest!" screamed Sale.

"Delirious," said one man softly.

"No sleep!" screamed Sale.

"There, there," said the man gently. A needle poked into Sale's arm.

Sale thrashed. "No sleep, go!" he mouthed horribly. "Oh, go!"

"Delirious," said one man. "Shock."

"No *sedative!*" screamed Sale.

The sedative flowed into him.

Eeeeeeee, sang the ancient winds.

Ahhhhhhhh, sang the ancient seas.

"No sedative, no sleep, please, don't, don't, *don't!*" screamed Sale, trying to get up. "You don't—understand!"

"Take it easy, old man, you're safe among us now, nothing to worry about," said the rescuer above him.

Leonard Sale slept. The two men stood over him.

As they watched, Sale's features changed violently. He groaned and cried and snarled in his sleep. His face was riven with emotion. It was the face of a saint, a sinner, a fiend, a monster, a darkness, a light one, many, an army, a vacuum, all, all!

He writhed in his sleep.

Eeeeeeeee! The sound burst from his mouth. *Ahhhhhhhh!* he screamed.

"What's wrong with him?" asked one of the two rescuers.

"I don't know. More sedative?"

"More sedative. Nerves. He needs more sleep."

They stuck the needle in his arm. Sale writhed and spat and moaned.

Then, suddenly, he was dead.

He lay there, the two men over him. "What a shame," said one of them. "What d'you make of it?"

"Shock. Poor guy. What a pity." They covered his face. "Did you ever see a face like that?"

"Totally insane."

"Loneliness. Shock."

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" Yes. Lord, what an expression. I hope never to see a face like *that* again."

" What a shame, waiting for us, and we arrive, and he dies anyway."

They glanced around. " What shall we do ? Shall we spend the night ? "

" Yes. It's good to be out of the ship."

" We'll bury him first, of course."

" Naturally."

" And spend the night in the open, with good air, right ? Good to be in the open again. After two weeks in that damned ship."

" Right. I'll find a spot for him. You start supper, eh ? "

" Done."

" Should be good sleeping tonight."

" Fine, fine."

They made a grave and said a word over it. They drank their evening coffee silently. They smelled the sweet air of the planet and looked at the lovely sky and the bright and beautiful stars.

" What a night," they said, lying down.

" Pleasant dreams," said one, rolling over.

And the other replied, " Pleasant dreams."

They slept.

* * *

LAND OF THE FREE

In England, queueing is the national passion. People try to explain it away, saying it was a war-time necessity. This is untrue. It is a pleasure discovered through the necessities of the war. It is the expression of the Englishman's self-discipline and at the same time recognition of his individual rights. " I have to wait; but my turn will come and then none, millionaires or ministers, small men or great, can be served before me."

They form a queue at the slightest provocation, just for the fun of it. I have seen long queues at stations when the train was practically empty and everybody could have walked in and taken a seat. Once I went to buy a theatre ticket. A gentleman was just being attended to, and I stood next to him. He turned towards me and declared with some hauteur: " There is a queue here, sir." " Where ? " I asked with surprise. " I am the queue," he replied with dignity.

GEORGE MIKES, *Down With Everybody !*

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STEPS IN THE NIGHT

If they find me dead this is why

by J. TREVOR STORY

THE first week in my new lodgings everything was all right. Morning in bed, coffee at eleven, lunch at one, afternoon at the races, dinner at Labouchière's, late evening and most of the night typing my novel. That is the only way I get things done; relaxation, stimulation, good food and then, in the quiet hours, it comes to me. I can write. I can earn my meagre living.

The first week, then, two chapters done and, better still, I had an idea what was coming next. That's what *I* thought. What came next was much wailing and squawking from the room above. A baby. A teething baby. A considerate father given to pacing the room making crooning noises and rattling pans of warm milk. Considerate to his wife but not to me.

I persevered, but my novel began to sag. By the Wednesday of the second week I was complaining bitterly to the hall porter about the status quo.

"That's Tony Rosay and his wife," he said. "They have a chip on their shoulder. Have you heard of Irene Rosay?"

I had. She had a house in the country, a house in the town, a racing stud and five large cars. She was a social butterfly who had lost her calendar. Sixty or more and still fluttering.

"That is Tony Rosay's aunt," the porter said. "She cut him off with a button when he married out of the social circle. He has to work for a living now, bring the baby up by hand and so forth. Just the same he's got expectations."

That night while I was trying to squeeze some dialogue out of my typewriter to the accompaniment of wailing and pacing, I had an arresting thought. Why, I wondered, did a man who got out of bed in the middle of the night to walk the baby put on heavy outdoor shoes instead of slippers? Were they annoying me purposely? I had the impulse to find out.

I took a stroll up the fire escape and looked through their window. What I saw was distinctly puzzling.

The clumping footsteps did not belong to Tony Rosay at all but to his dainty little wife. She was dressed charmingly in the

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bedroom manner, but she was wearing a pair of large male boots. She was concentrating on taking big strides across the room—the baby lay wailing in its cot! Odd.

Rosay was not there at all, but his wife was applying herself to this heavy walking business as though it were quite important. It did not make sense to me. Not until the morning.

I was pulled out of bed at the crack of 10 a.m. by a prowling detective sergeant; raincoat, slouch hat, questing eyes.

Did I know the Rosays?

"Only by sound," I told him. Then I explained.

He was interested. "And last night? Was Rosay treading your ceiling with the baby about midnight?"

Because I am intelligent I saw in a flash what important thing was going on above my head last night. The Rosays were committing an alibi.

"He was," I said. "Definitely."

Afterwards I learned that Irene Rosay the wealthy socialite had been shot dead last midnight by an unidentified killer. Tony Rosay was the sole beneficiary. His alibi stood or fell on my evidence. My evidence was reliable since I was no friend of his—as the hall porter testified. They had built up my resentment against the masculine footsteps and the crying baby, then cleverly switched feet for the occasion. The occasion was murder.

It was just unlucky for them that I took a look in that night. The question was, should I say anything about what I had seen?

I did. But not to the police. To Rosay. Afterwards. Quietly.

I never finished that novel, but who cares? I now have a suite of my own in his town house and the use of his country house. I have two race horses and a very luxurious saloon with chauffeur. All I haven't got is security.

If they find me dead, this is why.

* * *

SPECULATION

A member of the Stock Exchange vouches for this conversation, overheard on a Saturday morning when the building is open to the general public.

Two old ladies, slightly hard of hearing, were in the Kaffir market and this was explained to them.

"So this is the cattle market," said one.

"That's why it's called the Stock Exchange," said the other.

PETERBOROUGH, in *The Daily Telegraph*

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QUIET WATERS

"Happiness?" said the old man. "Well, I hadn't thought about it, exactly"

by MICHAEL FOSTER

WHILE the sun's flame passed from the western sky, and the high waters of the flood tide faded from apricot to violet-ash, old man McCluskey sat in the window of his house on Alki Beach and smoked his pipe. A tug coming upsound with an immense tow of log rafts was just perceptibly rounding the buoy: he had been hearing the labouring throb of its engines for an hour or more. In the next room, his wife was moving methodically about, setting the table and humming somewhat uncertainly a popular song which, he supposed, she had heard in a film that afternoon on her weekly shopping trip down town.

Across the darkening bay the lights of the city glimmered against the smoky purple wall of night looming in the east. In the valley beyond Harbour Island a tongue of orange fire licked skyward from the stack of a steel mill and subsided to a pulsing red glow. Old man McCluskey arose finally and went into the kitchen. Pausing in the lighted doorway, he saw his wife, a heavy, pleasant woman, whose hair was still quite dark, peering anxiously into the oven.

"The cake has fallen," she said, glancing at him absent-mindedly. "And I did want to have a real nice supper for the children."

Old man McCluskey pulled out his massive silver watch and blinked gravely at it.

"It's seven-nine," he stated with the scrupulous exactitude of a man who has nothing but leisure. "They ought to be here pretty soon now."

"It's a long drive down from Vancouver." His wife closed the oven door and stood up. "It's nice they could come down to spend Sunday with us, I think. Since Emma got married we haven't seen much of her."

"Eddie is a good boy." Old man McCluskey fumbled with the buttons of his shabby brown sweater. "I wonder, now . . . . Do you suppose he'll bring me some more of that English tobacco, this time? That's a fine smoke, I'll tell you."

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"Maybe. He's a good enough boy, all right, I guess. Emma is real fond of him, and she says he treats her elegantly. But he'll never get ahead in that job of his. I wish they'd move down here to Seattle. I'm sure Eddie could get work here. Then we could have Emma near to us."

Old man McCluskey grunted non-committally and went out to the back garden, where he knocked the ashes from his pipe against the railing. A little wind had come with the change of the tide, and a moored boat, somewhere down there in the darkness, was bumping irregularly against a pile. The wind smelled of salt and tide-flats, tinged faintly with smoke; it was freshening from the south-west, he noted carefully.

Returning to the kitchen, he took off his sweater and hung it behind the door. After washing his hands and smoothing his straggling grey moustache, he put on his well-brushed blue coat and looked at his watch again with a touch of impatience.

He was on his way to the back room to refill his pipe when he heard three loud honks on a motor horn in front of the house. As he turned towards the door he had a glimpse of his wife in the kitchen, hanging up her apron and hastily smoothing her hair. Before he could reach the door it flew open and Emma came in laughing.

"Hello, Pa," she said, giving him a perfunctory kiss. "Oh, there's Ma—well, we got here, all right." She was a large, robust girl, much like her mother. He looked past her to the doorway, where Eddie, a tall, studious-looking young man, was waiting bashfully. The two men shook hands stiffly and stood vaguely smiling while Emma and her mother moved off towards the bedroom, chattering volubly.

"Well, Eddie," old man McCluskey said as the bedroom door was closed firmly, "let me help you off with your coat, now. Make yourself at home." He noted with elaborate unconcern, as he took the coat and hung it on the hall-stand, that a round package, done up in pink wrapping paper, was in one of the side pockets.

"Come on into the parlour, Eddie," he added heartily. "Supper is all ready, and as soon as the womenfolks come out, I guess we'll be eating."

They sat in the parlour, beginning a tentative dialogue concerning business and politics. Suddenly Eddie stood up with an exclamation.

"I came pretty near forgetting something," he muttered, and went out into the hall. He came back a moment later, carrying the pink package.

"Here," he handed it to his father-in-law, "I just happened to remember you liked this. So I thought I'd bring it along."

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Old man McCluskey unwrapped the paper with fingers which trembled slightly, and held up to the light a tin of the English tobacco.

"Now, that's mighty fine," he said. "You didn't need to do that, Eddie. You shouldn't have done it. You'd better let me pay you for it."

"I should say not." Eddie leaned back and lit a cigarette. "No, sir. I just brought that along in the hopes that you'd like it. They say it's pretty fair tobacco. I don't smoke a pipe, myself."

"Best I ever smoked," the old man told him earnestly, "and I'm much obliged to you, Eddie. I'll just take this along, now, and put it away where I can get it first thing in the morning." He stopped in the doorway and looked back over the top of his spectacles. "I've got a little of my regular mixture left, so I can finish it up tonight. Then I can start smoking this tomorrow."

When he returned, his wife and Emma had come out of the bedroom, and they all went in to supper. He ate silently, enwrapped in tranquillity, while Emma and her mother carried on an animated conversation. Emma did most of the talking, recounting details of her new life in Vancouver, and occasionally appealing to Eddie for corroboration or approval.

As he finished his cake, he became aware that Emma was speaking to him.

"What did you say?" he asked, looking up.

"I wanted to know if you liked your tobacco that Eddie brought you," his daughter demanded. Before he could answer, his wife spoke brightly.

"Well, now, that was real nice of Eddie, I think," she said. "But isn't it awful expensive? I know from the way Father talks about it, it must—"

He gazed at his wife in alarm. But Eddie made a modest gesture.

"Oh, it didn't cost much," he assured her, "I was glad to do it."

After supper he went back to his favourite chair by the window, pleasantly conscious of the voices of his family from the kitchen, where his wife and Emma, with Eddie to help, were doing the dishes. Far to the northward, beyond the measured flicker of the West Point light, he could make out the blurred lights of a big steamer emerging from Admiralty Inlet. A level bank of cloud, blowing in from the sea, was slowly blotting out the stars in the west, and the wind was lacing the black waters of the bay with ghostly white crests.

He heard the doorbell ring, but he paid no attention to the subsequent murmurings in the front part of the house until his wife came into the room and switched on the light.

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"There's a young man here to see you," she said urgently; "he says he's a newspaper reporter—from the *Post*. He says he wants to see you personally."

He stared at her in profound perturbation.

"He says he'd like to interview you," his wife continued. "You'd better go in. Here, let me—"

She approached him and began fussing with his tie and brushing a few crumbs of tobacco off his vest with her hand. He saw that she was enormously impressed, and at once he assumed an air of calm sufficiency. With deliberate steps he preceded her down the hall. In the parlour he found a florid young man sitting on the sofa, smoking a cigarette with indifference. Emma had just finished saying something pleasant about the weather. Eddie leaned silently against the door.

"Ah—Mr. McCluskey?" the reporter asked, rising and shaking hands. "I'm Smythe of the *Post*. Won't you sit down?"

Old man McCluskey took his seat in the large wooden rocking chair by the table and placed both hands upon his knees.

"What can I do for you?" he enquired firmly.

"Well, Mr. McCluskey, I am the Inquiring Reporter," the visitor said. "Every day I go out and ask people questions—important questions, such as everybody is interested in—and then we run their answers in a column called the Inquiring Reporter. You probably read it every morning. Now, Mr. McCluskey, I want to ask you for your definition of happiness."

He took pencil and paper from his pocket and prepared to write. Mrs. McCluskey crossed the room flurried and beaming, and stood behind her husband's chair.

"Mr. Smythe wants you to tell him what happiness is, Father," she prompted. "I guess you mean true happiness, don't you, Mr. Smythe?"

"Well, I'd like to have Mr. McCluskey tell me his idea of happiness," the reporter answered. "Almost everybody has a different idea of it. Some people say 'money to do good with'—that's what Mrs. Perkins on Phinney Hill said; I've just finished interviewing her—and others would like a good time, like Miss Cross—she's a typist in the Marine—"

"Oh, but Mr. Smythe," Emma interrupted, "don't you think that true happiness, that is, I mean real, true happiness, comes from—"

Old man McCluskey cleared his throat.

"Where did you get my name?" he demanded. "What made you come out here to see me about that?"

"Well, what we do, Mr. McCluskey, is to pick some names out

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of the Directory at random, and then we call up the circulation department to make sure they are subscribers to the *Post*. Then I go out and ask them questions, like this one. So now, if you'll just tell me, I'll write your answer down. What would you say is your idea of happiness? Whatever you say is O.K. with me."

"Happiness? Well, I don't know. I hadn't thought about it, exactly," old man McCluskey said uncomfortably.

Sitting here, surrounded by his expectant family and watched by the stranger, he stared at his veined hands upon his knees and made a determined effort to think.

Since he was under the impression that it was the proper thing to do in this connection, he thought of his wedding day: and the swift, blurred recollection of a rainy day in autumn came to him. A day when the sea was grey, and the raw buildings of the new town clustered on the hill wore an air of desolate nostalgia against the forests and mountains.

They walked alone, he and a slender, dark woman, from her house to the white church above the harbour. She was an orphan, and she had sewn her wedding gown herself, copying it carefully from a picture in a magazine. Because she wanted a fine wedding, they had worked together the night before, decorating the church with late flowers from her garden and evergreen boughs from the forest. There were people waiting in the church, when she left him at the door. The ceremony was as she had planned it, as fine a wedding as could be wished.

Afterwards they walked back to her house, which she had scrubbed and swept and set in order, and where then, with the help of a neighbour, she cooked a wedding supper . . . But he remembered most clearly coming into her room that night, after he had smoked a pipe alone on the porch, to find her waiting for him . . .

He realized suddenly that the reporter was talking to him confidentially as he wrote on the paper he was holding in his hand. But as old man McCluskey strove to fix his attention upon what the young man was saying, another picture intruded itself, for the space of a heart-beat upon his mind. It was of a day in summer, and the sea was glittering under a northern sun. As he leaned out of the pilot-house window he could see a line of peaks, blue and silver, above a long, dark smudge of wooded shore away to the east. His fishing boat was rolling on a slow groundswell; on the scrubbed foredeck Bill Soames, his mate, was coiling a line, and he looked up with a seamed grin as McCluskey shouted something . . . But that, of course, had nothing to do with the question he was supposed to answer for the paper.

"So I'll write that down," the reporter was saying quickly.

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"There. That ought to be enough. Now, Mr. McCluskey, I'll just read you what we've said, and you see if it's O.K.

"*Happiness is found in unselfishness, and we are always the most contented when we are doing all we can for other people*—let's change that to *others*. Now—*In my own case, my happiest moments have come from having kindly thoughts and from helping people, both loved ones and friends. True happiness cannot be bought with money. I have always believed in following the Golden Rule*—there's no need to quote that, everybody knows it, don't you think, Mr. McCluskey ? *and that should be enough to make anyone happy throughout life. My definition of happiness would be to do one's duty, lead an unselfish life and be kind to one's fellow men.*

"How's that ? "

Old man McCluskey blinked and fumbled for his pipe.

"Well, I guess that's about the size of it, all right," he said.

Mr. Smythe stood up and shook his hand.

"All right, Mr. McCluskey," he smiled cordially. "That's fine. Now, if I can borrow that photograph of you there on the piano, that will be all. We'll mail it back to you tomorrow. I've got a photographer outside in the car, but if I can have this picture we won't need to call him in. Ah, that's fine. Good night, everybody."

After the reporter had gone, old man McCluskey went back to his window and finished his pipe in silence. Lying in bed beside his wife that night, he listened for a while to the drowsy murmur from the other bedroom where Emma and Eddie were staying, and to the regular, heavy breathing of his wife. He thought with pleasure of the tin of English tobacco Eddie had brought him, and as he fell asleep he could almost feel the pleasant bite of it upon his tongue. He would smoke the first pipeful of it, he decided, while he took his morning walk along the sea-wall after breakfast.

* * *

PATRONYMIC

An Indian who insisted his name was "Square Garden" is held in jail here, unable to pay a fine of sixteen dollars for being drunk.

The police had difficulty learning his real name. When asked his first name he replied, "Madison."

From "DAILY COLONIST," *British Columbia*

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MUTINY!

"Teta," I said quietly, "we start to take the trees down tomorrow"

by JAMES A. MICHENER

THE day I arrived at Noumea, Admiral Kester called me into his office. He had one of the rooms near the gingerbread balcony on Rue Marechal Gallieni. He said, "We were lucky at Coral Sea. It's the next battle that counts." He waved his hand over the islands. His finger came to rest, I remember, on a large island shaped like a kidney, Guadalcanal.

"Some day we'll go into one of those islands. When we do, we've got to have a steady flow of planes from New Zealand and Australia. Now look!" Spreading his fingers wide he dragged them down the map from Bougainville, New Georgia, and Guadal. He brought them together at Santo. "We have Santo. We'll keep it. It's the key. And we can supply Santo from Noumea. But if we ever need planes in an emergency, we must be able to fly them up to Noumea from New Zealand and Australia." He slashed his thumb boldly from Guadalcanal to Auckland. "That's the life-line.

"Now if you'll look at the air route from Noumea to Auckland you'll see a speck in the ocean not far from the route from Australia to Noumea. That speck's an island. It's vital. Absolutely vital!" His chin jutted out. His stubby forefinger stabbed at the map. The vital speck was Norfolk Island.

There is no other island in the South Pacific like Norfolk. Lonely and lost, it is the only island in the entire ocean where no men lived before the white man came. Surrounded by gaunt cliffs, beat upon endlessly by the vast ocean, it is a speck under the forefinger of God, or Admiral Kester.

"You'll find some Americans down there," the admiral continued. "Building an airstrip. They're bogged down. Look." He handed me a dispatch from Norfolk: "TWO SITES CHOSEN X OPPOSITION TO BETTER SITE TERRIFIC X CAN WE IGNORE LOCAL WISHES X ADVISE X TONY FRY X."

"This man Fry," the admiral remarked, "is a queer duck. One of the best reserves I've seen. He wouldn't bother me with details unless something important had developed. Obviously, we can ignore local opinion if we have to. The Australian Government has

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placed responsibility for the protection of Norfolk squarely on us. We can do what we damned well want to. But it's always wisest to exercise your power with judgment. Either you do what the local people want to do, or you jolly them into wanting to do what you've got to do anyway."

He studied the map again. "They're the life-lines." His broad thumb hit Guadal again. "We've got to have an airstrip on Norfolk. And a big one." He turned away from the map. "Now you run on down to Norfolk. Take the old PBY. And you tell Fry you have my full authority to settle the problem. Don't make anyone mad, if you can help it. But remember the first job: Win the war!"

The old PBY flew down from Noumea on a day of rare beauty. We did not fly high. Below us the waves of the great ocean formed and fled in golden sunlight. There was a fair breeze from Australia, as if that mighty island were restless, and from the Tasman Sea gaunt waves, riding clear from the polar ice cap, came north and made the sea choppy. The winter sun was low, for it was now July. It hurried across the sky before us.

After six hours I saw a speck on the horizon. It grew rapidly into an island, and then into an island with jagged cliffs. Norfolk was below us. I remember clearly every detail of that first view. Not much more than ten square miles. Forbidding cliffs along all shores. A prominent mountain to the north. Fine plateau land elsewhere.

"Oughtn't to be much trouble building an airstrip there," I mused aloft. "Run it right down the plateau. Throw a cross strip about like that, and you have an all-wind landing area. Looks simple. This guy Tony Fry must have things screwed up."

"We'll land in that little bay," the pilot said.

"I don't see any," I replied.

"Between the cliffs," he said.

I looked, and where he pointed there was a small bay. Not protected from the sea, and terribly small. But a bay. "The waves look mighty high to me," I said.

"They are," he laughed. "Damned high."

He went far out to sea and came in for his landing. But he had too much speed and zoomed over the island, climbing rapidly for another attempt. We came roaring in from the tiny bay, sped over a winding hill road leading up to the plateau and then right down the imaginary line I had drawn as the logical location for the airstrip. It was then that I saw the pines of Norfolk.

For on each side of that line, like the pillars of a vast and glorious cathedral, ran the pine trees, a stately double column stretching for two miles towards the mountain. "My God," I whispered to myself. "That's it. That's the problem."

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We flew to sea once more, levelled off and again tried the tricky landing. Again we had too much speed. Again we gunned the old PBY over the hill road, up to the plateau and down the pines of Norfolk. We were so low we could see along the dusty road running between the columns. An old woman in a wagon was heading down to the sea. She looked up sharply as we roared overhead. And that was my first view of Teta Christian.

We landed on the third try, bouncing our teeth out, almost. A tall, thin, somewhat stooped naval officer waved to us from the crumbling stone pier. It was Lt. Tony Fry, dressed in a sloppy shirt and a pair of shorts. He greeted us when we climbed ashore and said, "Glad to have you aboard, sir. Damned glad to have you aboard." He had twinkling eyes and a merry manner. "Now if you'll step over here to our shed, I'll make the welcome more sincere."

He led us through the crowd of silent islanders to a small stone cow shed not far from the pier. "But this cow shed is built of dressed stone," I said. "It's better than you see back home."

"I know," Tony said. "The convicts had to be kept busy. If there was nothing else to do, they built cow sheds."

"What convicts?" I asked.

"Gentlemen, a real welcome!" Tony produced a bottle of Scotch. I learned later that no one ever asked Tony where or how he got his whisky. He always had it.

"This island," he said to me as we drank, "is the old convict island. Everything you see along the shore was built by the convicts."

"From where?"

"From Australia. England sent her worst convicts to Australia. And those who were too tough for Australia to handle were sent over here. This isn't a pretty island," Fry said. "Or wouldn't be, if it could talk."

"Well!" I said, looking at Tony. "About this airstrip?"

He smiled at me quizzically. "Admiral Kester?" he asked.

"Yes."

He smiled again. "You came down here to see about the airstrip?" I nodded. He grinned, an infectious, lovely grin showing his white and somewhat irregular teeth. "Commander," he said. "Let's have one more drink!"

"I have a terrible premonition that the trouble is that row of pine trees," I said as he poured.

Fry didn't bat an eye. He simply grinned warmly at me and raised his glass. "To the airstrip!" he said. "Thank God it's your decision, not mine."

At this moment there was a commotion outside the shed. "It's Teta!" voices cried. A horse, panting from his gallop, drew to a

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halt and wagon wheels crunched in the red dust. A high voice cried out, " Where is he ? Where's Tony ? "

" In there ! In with the new American."

" Let me in ! " the high voice cried.

And into our shed burst Teta Christian, something over ninety. She had four gaunt teeth in her upper jaw and two in her lower. Her hair was thin and wispy. But her frail body was erect. She went immediately to Tony. He took her by the hand and patted her on the shoulder. " Take it easy, now, Teta," he said.

She pushed him away and stood before me. " Why do you come here to cut down the pine trees ? " she asked, her high voice rising to a wail.

" I . . ."

But Tony interrupted. " Be careful what you say, Commander. It's the only adequate site on the island."

" You shut up ! " old Teta blurted out. " You shut up, Tony."

" I merely came down to see what should be done," I said.

" Well, go back ! " Teta cried, pushing me with her bony hand. " Get in the airplane. Go back. Leave us alone."

" We'd better get out of here," I said. " Where do I bunk ? "

" That's a problem," Fry said, whimsically. " It's a damned tough problem."

" Anywhere will do me," I assured him. " Why not put up with you ? I'll only be here one night."

Tony raised his eyebrows as if to say, " Want to bet on that ? " He laughed again. " That's what the problem is, Commander. I sort of don't think you should live with me." He paused. " I . . . I . . ."

" Hm ! " I said to myself. " Woman trouble. These damned Yanks. Let them get anywhere near a dame. I suppose Fry has something lined up. Officers are worse than the men."

" Very well," I said aloud. " Anywhere will do."

I reached for my single piece of luggage, a battered parachute bag. As I did so a chubby young girl of fifteen or sixteen came into the shed and ran up to Tony in that strange way you can spot every time. She was desperately in love with him. To my utter disgust, I noticed that she was vacant-eyed and that her lower jaw was permanently hung open.

" This is Lucy," Fry said, patting the young girl affectionately on the shoulder. Lucy looked at me and grinned. " Hello," she said.

" We could find quarters for you in the old convict houses," Tony suggested. " Down here along the shore."

I felt a bit sick at my stomach : American officers and native women. " If the convict houses are as well built as this shed, I'll be in luck," I said.

" Oh, they're much finer construction," he assured me.

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"Why don't you get in the plane and fly back?" old Teta whined.

"I can drive you over in the jeep," Fry suggested.

"I'm much more interested, really, in surveying the island," I said. "Let's just drop the bag and get going."

"You tell him, Tony," Teta wailed. "You tell him the truth!"

Fry wiped his forehead. I found out later that he perspired more than any man in the Pacific. He was always looking for a cool spot or someone else to do his work. "Now look, Teta. You run along. Get us some orangeade fixed up. Get us a nice dinner for tonight." He reached in his pocket and pulled out what change he had. Mostly pennies. "Have you a buck?" he asked me. I gave him one. "You take this, Teta, and scram!" He slapped her gently on the bottom and pushed her out of the shed. We followed and climbed into his jeep. Lucy was already sitting in front.

"No, Lucy!" Fry said. "You'll have to get in the back." As the girl climbed over the seats, Tony returned to the shed to speak to a group of sullen native men. At this moment a young Army lieutenant hurried up to the jeep.

"Boy, are we glad to see you?" he blurted out. "It's about time somebody came down here to straighten things up. We were all ready to start building the strip when Fry called the whole thing off. You got to be firm, Commander," he whispered. "Stop all this damned nonsense. That old Teta is the worst of the lot."

I looked over my shoulder at Lucy. She was sitting there quietly, saying nothing, hearing nothing. "Don't bother about her, Commander," the lieutenant said. "She's crazier than a bedbug." Fry left the shed and the Army man hurried off.

"That was the big prison," Tony said as we drove up the red road from the pier. "And that's Gallows Gate."

I studied the superb gate. The lava rock from which it was built was cleaner and fresher, more beautifully cut and matched than in 1847, when the magnificent structure was built. Proportioned like the body of a god, this gate was merely one of hundreds of superb pieces of construction. There were walls as beautiful as a palace at Versailles, old houses straight from the drawing boards of England, towers, blockhouses, salt works, chimneys, barns, a chapel, granaries, and lime pits, all built of grey lava rock, all superb and perfect. They moaned beneath the Norfolk pines when winds whipped in at night, for they were empty. They were dead and empty ruins. They were not rotting by the sea, for they were stronger than when they were built. But they were dead and desolate.

"I can never go past this one without stopping," Fry said. We climbed out of the jeep beside an exquisite piece of building. "If you want to," Fry said to Lucy. "Come along." The girl scrambled

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out and stood close to Fry as we studied the officers' bath house.

" They were afraid to swim in the sea," he said. " Sharks. And too many officers were drowned there by the prisoners. They'd hide behind rocks and drag the officers under the waves. So this was built." The bath house was a small building beside the road. Twenty steps or more, perfectly carved out of rock, descended to a flagstone bath possibly twenty-four feet square. The western end of the bath dipped slightly so that water would run free to the ocean.

The bath was a superb thing, walled with matched rock, patiently built in the perfection of men who had endless time. But it was not the bath which captivated Tony's imagination and my horror. It was the conduit by which the water of a little stream was diverted into the bath. This tunnel was six feet high. It was dug completely through the base of a small hill about three hundred feet long. It was paved with beautiful stone. It was arched like the most graceful portico ever built. Down the roof of the three-hundred-foot conduit were keystones of perfect design. And all this was buried under a hill of dirt where no man would ever see.

When Tony dopped me off at my quarters he coughed once or twice. " I'm terribly sorry to leave you down here," he said. " But I think this is best." Lucy was crawling over the seats to the front of the jeep.

" This will do me," I said.

" I'd have you up to my diggings," he continued. " But it would be embarrassing. It would be terribly embarrassing to you. That's the mistake I made. You see, I board with old Teta Christian. She'd love to have you stay with her. The soul of hospitality. But if you did, she'd capture you the way she has me."

" The pine trees ? " I asked.

" Yes," he replied. " The only good site on the island."

" Then why don't you cut them down and build the strip ? "

Fry looked at me for more than a minute. His eyes were clear and joking. He had a sharp nose and chin. He was about thirty years old and didn't give a damn about anything or anybody. He was taking my measure, and although I was his superior officer I stood at attention and tried to pass muster. Apparently I did. He punched me softly on the arm. " You see, Commander," he said. " Old Teta Christian is the granddaughter of Fletcher Christian, the mutineer. All those people at the pier were *Bounty* people. They don't push around easy." He winked at me and left. Lucy leaned over and blew the horn as he backed the jeep into a tight circle.

" *Bounty* people ! " I said to myself. " So this is where they wound up when they left Pitcairn Island ? This paradise ! "

And it was a paradise ! Oh, it was one of the loveliest paradises in the vast ocean. Untouched by man for eons, it grew its noble pine

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trees hundreds of feet high and always straight. It developed a plateau full of glens and valleys to warm the heart of any man. It grew all manner of food and protected its secrets by forbidding cliffs. I came to Norfolk for a day. I stayed a week, and then another. And I lived in a paradise, cool, fresh, clean and restful.

Late that afternoon Tony drove down for me. I said, "We'll look the two sites over and I can fly back in the morning."

"Now don't rush things, Commander," Tony replied. "We can study the island tomorrow. Old Teta asked a few of the *Bounty* people in for dinner. They want to meet you. Purely social."

"Fry, I don't want to be brusque about this, but the reason I'm down here is that Admiral Kester is pretty well browned off at the shilly-shallying. There's a war on!"

"That I'm aware of," Tony replied. "I'm in it."

"So if you don't mind, I'd like to see the two sites right now. Then, if we have time, we'll call at the old woman's."

"Very well," Fry said. I was glad to see that Lucy was not waiting for us in the jeep. The fat little moron was becoming somewhat unnerving. But as we drove past the deserted ruins of the prison she ran out into the road. "We better take her along," Tony said. "She never says much." So he stopped the jeep and Lucy climbed in the back.

"The first site," Tony said, "is at the northwestern tip of the island. Up by the cable station." We drove along the shore road to reach the place. Inland I could see one sweeping valley after another, each with its quota of pine trees tall against the late afternoon sky.

The location we had come to visit was disappointing indeed. To the east and south the mountain encroached on the potential field. Landings would be difficult. Cliffs prohibited much more than a four thousand foot runway. Any cross runway for alternate winds was out of the question. "Not much of a location for an airstrip," I said.

"Not too good," Tony agreed. "Want to see the other?"

"I'd like to," I answered. He drove south from the cable station until he came to a sight which made me blink my eyes. There, on this lonely island, was a chapel, a rustic gem of architecture. It was built of wood and brown stone among a grove of pines. It was so different in spirit from the precise, brutal buildings on the water front that I must have shown my surprise.

"The old Melanesian Mission," he said. "From this spot all the Hebrides and Solomons were Christianized. This is where the saints lived."

"The saints?" I asked.

"Yes. Lucy's great-uncle was one. He went north from here. To an island called Vanicoro. The natives roasted him alive. And

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during his torment he kept shouting, 'God is love. Jesus saves.' The old men of the village decided there must be something to his religion after all. They set out in canoes to a near-by island and brought another missionary back. A whole village was converted. There were lots of saints around here."

"Was he . . ." I inclined my head towards the rear seat.

"Sure. They all are, more or less. Listen to names at the party tonight. Christian, Young, Quintal, Adams. Do they mean anything to you?"

"The mutineers from the *Bounty*?" I asked.

"That's right. And Nobbs and Buffet, the missionaries that followed. The mutineers have been intermarrying for more than a hundred years. I guess they're all a little nuts." The frankness of Fry's comment startled me. I turned to look at Lucy, expecting to find her in tears. She grinned at me, with her mouth open.

"This is the other site," Fry said. We were on a little hill. Before us spread the heart of the plateau, with the pines of Norfolk laid out along an ideal runway.

"I saw this from the air," I said. "Ideal. We can even run a six thousand foot auxiliary strip for alternate landings."

"That's right," Tony agreed.

"Let's get going tomorrow," I suggested.

"Good idea. Let's eat now." Tony threw the jeep into low and started slowly down the hill. When he reached the bottom, Lucy cried out, "Blow the horn! Blow the horn!" Fry did not obey, so Lucy leaned over the seat and pushed the button for about a minute. From a ramshackle house a host of children ran into the dusty road beside the crawling jeep. "It's Lucy! It's Lucy!" they screamed. "It's Lucy in the jeep!" Our chubby moron grinned at them, threw them kisses, and twisted the horn button. Then she sat back in her seat quietly and said no more.

When we were past the half-ruined house, Tony threw the jeep into high and we hurried towards old Teta's farm. In doing so, we had to enter the avenue of pine trees down which I had seen Teta hurrying that morning. As we passed under their vast canopy noise from the jeep was muffled. Eighty feet above us, on either side, tree after tree, the pines of Norfolk raised their majestic heads. There was a wind from the south, that wind which sweeps up from the Antarctic day after day. It made a singing sound among the pines. Nobody said anything, not Tony nor I nor Lucy.

I was not unhappy when we turned off the road of the pines and into a little lane. It led past some ruins that, in the midst of the South Pacific, were breath-taking. Above me rose what seemed to be a large portion of an aqueduct that might have graced the Appian Way.

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"What's that?" I cried.

"Part of a series of stables," Tony replied. "The convicts were building it for the governor's horses when the lid blew off the island." I looked at the fantastic stables. Graceful curved archways, ten or a dozen in number, had been erected in the 1850s. Now they stood immaculately clean, the stone finished with exquisite care, and arches proportioned like the temples of ancient Rome.

Two hundred yards from the end of the stables we entered a garden filled with all kinds of flowers, shrubs, and fruit trees. This was Teta Christian's home. "When the *Bounty* folk first came here, Commander," she said in her high thin voice, "my father, Fletcher Christian, chose this place for his farm. He liked the view down that valley." She drew the curtain aside and showed me her prospect, a valley of lovely pine trees, a thin stream, and curves lost in the vales that swept down to the sea. "My father, Fletcher Christian, planted all this land. But I put in the orange trees." It was uncanny, oranges growing so luxuriantly beside the pines.

"When my father, Fletcher Christian, came to this island," she said, "he and Adams Quintal looked over the land. Am I boring you, Commander?"

"Oh, no! Please, go ahead. I'm very interested."

"He and Adams Quintal looked over the land. Nobbs Buffet and Thomas Young were there. They decided that they would not live along the shore. That was prison land."

"Were there no prisoners there?" I asked.

"Oh, no! After the great mutiny all the prisoners were taken away. Two years later they gave the empty island to us. I am the last person living who came here from Pitcairn," she moaned on. "I was five years old when we sailed. I remember Pitcairn well, although some people say you can't remember that far back." She lapsed into the strange Pitcairn dialect, composed of sea-faring English from the *Bounty* modified by Tahitian brought in by girls the mutineers had stolen. Her friends argued with her for a moment or two in the impossible jargon. They were Quintals and Nobbs and Buffets and endless Christians.

"They still don't believe me," Teta laughed. "But I remember one day standing on the cliffs at Pitcairn. It was right beside the statue of the old god my father found when he came to Pitcairn . . ." Her mind wandered. I never knew whether the original Christian, that terrible-souled mutineer, was her grandfather or her great-grandfather, or someone even farther back.

"So my father, Fletcher Christian, and Adams Quintal decided that they would have nothing whatever to do with the prison lands. My father, Mr. Fletcher Christian, was a very good man and he helped to build the Mission which you saw today. He would not

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take any money for his work. My father said, ' If the Lord has given me this land and this valley, I shall give the Lord my work.' Am I boring you with this talk, Commander ? "

I assured her again and again that night that I was not bored by the memories of Norfolk Island. I made my point so secure that she promised to visit me in the morning and to show me the records of the first settlement of the mutineers. Accordingly, at 0900 the jeep drove up to my quarters. Tony and Lucy were in front. Old Teta sat in the back. " We'll just go down the road a little way," she said. She led us to the largest of the remaining prison buildings. It was hidden behind a wall of superb construction. This wall was more securely built, more thoroughly protected with corner blockhouses and ramparts, than the gaol itself.

" What did they keep in here ? " I asked. " The murderers ? "

" Oh, no ! " she said in a high voice of protest. " The gaol keepers lived in here."

" But that twenty-foot wall ? The broken glass ? "

" To keep the prisoners out. In case they mutinied. They did, too. All the time. This was an island of horror," she said.

Up past the post office old Teta led us, up two flights of stairs and into a large, almost empty room. It was the upper council chamber, and upon its walls rested faded photographs of long-dead Christians, Buffets, Quintals, and members of the other families. Lucy stood on one foot and studied their grim faces.

Teta, however, went to an old cupboard built into the wall. From it she took a series of boxes, each thick with dust and tied with red string. She peered into several boxes and finally selected one. Banging it on the table until her white hair was lost in a cloud, she said, " This is the one." From it she took several papers and let them fall through her idle hands on to the table. I picked up one. A petition from Fletcher Christian to the governor. " And I therefore humbly beg your permission to let my white bull Jonas run wild upon the common lands. If he can get to plenty of cows, he will not have a bad temper, and since he is the best bull on the island, everybody will be better off." It was signed in an uncertain writing much different from the petition.

" This is the one," Teta said. It was another petition signed by Fletcher Christian, Adams Quintal, Nobbs Buffet and Thomas Young : " Because God has been kind in his wisdom to bring us here, it is proposed than an avenue of pine trees that grow upon this island and nowhere else in the world be planted and if we do not live to see them tall our children will." The petition was granted.

" I ought to go out to survey the field," I said.

" Well, you needn't go till afternoon," Tony replied. " Tell the

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PBY to lay over another day. Some of the villagers are having a picnic lunch for us."

I attended. The more I heard of Teta's stories the more interested I became. After we had eaten and I had consumed half a dozen oranges she said, "Would you like to see the old headstones? In the cemetery?"

I was indeed interested. She led me to the cemetery, this old, old woman who would soon be there herself. It lay upon a gently rising hillside near the ocean. "In this section are the *Bounty* people," she said. There were the white headstones, always with the same names: Quintal, Young, Adams, Christian. "I am a Quintal," she said. "I married this man." She pointed to the gravestone of Christian Nobbs Quintal. Beside it were the inevitable tiny stones: "Mary Nobbs Quintal, Aged 3 Mos." "Adams Buffet Quintal, Aged 1 Yr." "Nobbs Young Christian Quintal, Aged 8 Mos."

"My father, Fletcher Christian, is buried over there," she said. "He's not really buried there, either. He was lost at sea. And down here are the convict graves. This corner is for those that were hung." I studied the dismal relics. "Thomas Burke, Hung 18 July 1838. He struck a guard and God struck him." "Timothy O'Shea, Hung 18 July 1838. He killed a guard. May God have Mercy on his Soul." The tragic story of hatred, sudden death, breaks, and terrible revenge was perpetuated in the weathering stones. "Thomas Bates, Worcester, America, 18 Yrs. Old." The rest was lost.

"They buried the mutineers over here," old Teta whined.

I looked at the close cluster of graves. English peasant names, Irish peasants. "What did they do?" I asked.

"These are the men who killed the guards and buried their bodies in the bridge. There where we had our picnic. Bloody Bridge."

"They hung them all?"

"All of them." She looked over the graves to the restless sea. "My father, Fletcher Christian, said he wanted none of their bloody buildings. So the *Bounty* people tore down the houses we were given along the shore. When my father said that."

It was now too late for me to inspect the airstrip that day, so I told the PBY pilot to take off early next morning and return to Noumea without me. I would send a dispatch when I got my work done. That night I sat in Teta's house by the ruined stables and listened as she told us about the days on Pitcairn. "My father, Fletcher Christian," she said, "was known as the leader of the mutineers. But Captain Bligh was a very evil man. My father told me that Mr. Christian had to do what he did. There are some who say it is a shame Tahitian girls went to Pitcairn, too, but my father, Fletcher Christian, said that if Tahitian girls didn't go, who would?

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And that is a question you cannot answer. I am half Tahitian myself. Nobody in our family has ever married outside the mutiny people. That is, the Pitcairn people. A lot of people think this is bad." She spoke to her island friends in Pitcairn, and they laughed.

"Teta!" a Mr. Quintal said. "You're drinking too much of the lieutenant's rum. You're getting drunk."

Teta leaned over and patted Fry on the arm. "Drinking a little rum isn't getting drunk," she said. Fry poured her some whisky. To Teta everything from a bottle was rum, a relic of the old seafaring days.

"What we are laughing about, Commander, is a funny old man came here some time ago. Measured all our heads. He was a German. He made pictures of who everybody married and then proved we were all crazy people. His book had pictures, too. I was one of the people that wasn't crazy, but Nobbs over there," and she pointed to an islander, "his picture was in the front of the book. He was very crazy!"

"You might as well stay here the night," Fry said, but I disagreed. I preferred to sleep in my own quarters.

I went up to the proposed airstrip next morning and surveyed the job that lay ahead. Tony was not visible, but the energetic young Army lieutenant was wheeling his tractors into position with help supplied by the Australian Government. "Well," he said. "I guess we're ready to start now."

I was about to nod when I looked over towards the Norfolk pines and there was old Teta. She was in her wagon, the reins tied to the whip. Just watching. "You can start clearing away the brush," I said.

"But the trees, Commander!"

"We'll wait a few days on that," I said.

"But damn it all, Commander! It will take us a long time to get those trees down. We can't do anything till that's done."

"I want to look over that other site, first. We can get that land cheaper."

"But my God!" the lieutenant cried. "We been through all that before."

"We'll go through it again!" I shouted.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

I walked over to study one of the trees. It was six feet through the base, had scaly bark. Its branches grew out absolutely parallel to the ground. Its leaves were like spatulas, broad and flat, yet pulpy like water-holding cactus. In perfect symmetry it rose high into the air. I thought, "It was a tree like this that Captain Cook saw when he inspected Norfolk. He was the first man, white or black, ever known

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to visit the island. It was a tree like this that made him say, 'And the hospitable island will be a fruitful source of spars for our ships.'"

"I'm going down to the Mission," old Teta said as she drove up. "Would you like to ride along?" I climbed into her wagon. When we drove past Lucy's corner, that grinning girl saw us. Quick as an animal she ran to her own horse and vaulted into the saddle. Whipping him up with her heels, she soon caught up with us.

"Going to the Mission?" she asked.

"Come along," the frail old woman said. "Lucy's a good girl," Teta said. "She's not too bright."

At the Mission we tied the horse and Lucy let hers roam free. The chapel was even lovelier than I had thought from the road. Inside, it was made of coloured marble, rare shells from the northern islands, wood from the Solomons, and carvings from the Hebrides. Not ornate, it was rich beyond imagination. Gold and silver flourished. Each pew end was set in mother-of-pearl patiently carved by some island craftsmen. Scenes from Christ's life predominated in the intaglios, but occasionally a free Christian motif had been worked out. The translucent shell spoke of the love that had been lavished upon it.

The windows perplexed me. They reminded me of something I had seen elsewhere, but the comparison I made was so silly that I did not even admit it to myself.

"The windows," Teta said, "were made by a famous man in England and sent out here on a boat."

"Good heavens," I said, "it is Burne-Jones!" How wildly weird his ascetic figures looked in that chapel.

"Bishop Patteson built this chapel," old Teta whined on. But her memories were vague. She got the famous Melanesian missionaries all confused. She had known each of them, well. Selwyn and Patteson and Paton.

"My brother, Fletcher Christian, went up north with good Bishop Selwyn," she said. "They went to Vanicoro where my uncle, Fletcher Christian, was burned alive. He converted a whole village by that. He was a very saintly man. My brother was also named Fletcher Christian. That tablet up there is to him, not to my uncle. My brother came home one day and knelt down. It was right after my father died at sea. He said, that is my brother Fletcher Christian said, 'I am going to follow God! I am going with Bishop . . .'" She faltered. "'I am going with Bishop Patteson.' He went up north to an island right near Vanicoro. Bali-ha'i. He was a very good missionary. Bishop Paton said of him, 'Fletcher Christian rests with God!'

"He rests with God because the natives shot at him with a poisoned arrow. They shot him through the right arm. He got

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well, at first, but blood poisoning set in, and Bishop Patteson knew he was going to die. They prayed for my brother for three days, and all that time he twisted on the ground and cried out, ' I am saved ! I am washed in the blood of the Lord.' And for three days he cried like that, and his jaws locked tight shut and he cried through his teeth, ' God is my salvation ! ' And on the fourth day he died." Teta sat in the now-empty Mission, deserted because its function was fulfilled. Its word had been carried north to all the islands.

Back at my quarters that afternoon I was in a confusion of thoughts. No one could tell how urgently we might need the airstrip on Norfolk, nor how soon. Suppose the Japs defeated us in some great battle in the Hebrides! In such an event the airstrip on Norfolk might be essential to our life itself. Thought of this steeled me to the inescapable conclusion. The pines of Norfolk must go. An end to this silly nonsense !

I walked slowly down to the old stone cow shed where the Army had its headquarters. " We'll start in the morning," I told them. " Get the trees out of there."

" It's only three now, sir," the eager young lieutenant said. " We could get a couple down this afternoon ! "

" Time enough in the morning," I said. " Get your gear ready."

" It's been ready for two weeks," he said coldly.

I felt honour-bound to tell the islanders that the irrevocable decision had been made. I planned to do so that evening, at Teta's. I climbed the dusty road from the prison camp to the free lands and the pine-filled valleys. Fry must have been sleeping that afternoon, as he frequently did, for Lucy clattered past me on her horse, riding like a centaur, raising a fine hullabaloo. She would tear past going in one direction, then stop, wheel her big horse, and rush by me the other way. She kept this up for eight or ten sallies, never saying a word.

When I reached the avenue of pines my resolution wavered. I said, " I can't permit this thing ! The loveliest monument in the South Pacific completely destroyed. No, by God ! I'll do everything I can. Up to the hilt. I've got to ! " And I hurried back and sent an urgent dispatch to Admiral Kester. It was a long one. Gave the dimensions of the two fields. Told him that the north field could have no cross runway and would be hampered by the small mountain. I said there was great opposition to the central field. I closed the dispatch as follows : " REQUEST PERMISSION PROCEED NORTH FIELD."

I did not go to Teta's for dinner. I missed dinner, and was not aware of that fact. About ten o'clock that night I got my answer. It

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was brief, and in it I could hear many oaths from the admiral such as: "What are those damned fools doing down there?" and "By God, why can't they look at the goddam facts and make up their minds?" His dispatch had its mind made up: "RE UR 140522 X NEGATIVE X REPEAT NEGATIVE X KESTER."

But the dispatch relieved me. I clutched it in my hand and walked up the hill to the plateau where the *Bounty* people lived. I walked down the long avenue of trees and thought, "You are not dying by my hand."

Teta and Tony were alone, drinking rum. Lucy, of course, sat in a corner and watched Tony all night. "My father, Fletcher Christian, was a very good sailor," Teta said. "It was a great pity for this island when he was killed at sea. It was at the Cascade Landing. There are only two places where boats can possibly land on Norfolk. It reminds me of Pitcairn in that respect. My grandfather, Fletcher Christian, said that if a man could sail in and out of Pitcairn Island, he was indeed a sailor. I have been told my father was the best sailor on either island, but he was killed at sea. The waves crushed his boat and threw him on the rocks. Right at the landing. Then pulled him back out to sea and we never got the body."

"Bad news," I said. Tony poured old Teta another drink. Lucy came to the table and asked for some rum. "No, Lucy!" Tony said. "You go back and sit down."

"From Noumea?" Tony asked.

"Yes. I wired the Admiral."

"I know," Tony said. "I did the same thing."

"He made the decision," I said.

"I know," Tony replied. "I passed the buck to you. And you passed it to the Admiral."

"Teta," I said quietly. "We start to take the trees down tomorrow."

The old mutineer looked at me and started to speak. No words came. She licked her six gaunt teeth and took a big drink of rum. "I remember when my father, Fletcher Christian, planted those trees," she said. "I ran along beside the men. They laid out two lines. There was no road there, then. Four men stood with poles and my father said to Adams Quintal—it was his son Christian Nobbs Quintal that I married. We were married by a missionary from the mission. Bishop Patteson married us, and then he took my brother, Fletcher Christian, up to the islands, where the young man died of blood poisoning." The old woman dropped her head on her hands. The lamp threw an eerie glow upon her white hair.

"She's drunk again," Lucy said. "Too much rum."

"Lucy!" Fry said. "I told you to sit over there and not talk."

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"We'll have to start tomorrow. In the morning," I said. I waved the dispatch at him.

"You don't have to prove it to me, Commander," Fry chuckled. "I know what you feel, exactly. It's the islanders you've got to prove it to. Save the dispatch for them."

I don't know who spread the word. I can't believe it was Teta, and Lucy was sitting tight-lipped in the corner when I left. Perhaps the islanders heard it from the Army. At any rate, early next morning a crowd of people gathered at the pine trees. As I approached with the Army engineers, Nobbs Quintal, whose photograph had served as the frontispiece to the book which proved that all Norfolk *Bounty* people were degenerate, tipped his hat and asked me if he could speak. I clenched my hands and thought, "Here it comes!"

"Commander," Nobbs Quintal said. "We know the trees have to go. We know there's war. My son is at war. In Egypt. Old Teta has five grandsons in the Army. We know you've tried to change the airport. We heard about your message yesterday. But won't you wait one more day? We want to take some pictures of the trees."

They had an old box camera and some film. An American soldier had a pretty good miniature camera, and an Australian had a very good French job. All morning they took pictures of the trees. The Quintals and the Christians and Nobbses and all the others stood beneath the trees, drove wagons along the dusty road, and made family groups. About noon Nobbs Quintal went over by the stables and hitched up Teta's wagon. The old woman appeared between the trees and looked sadly into space as she was photographed with various families and alone. The reins were wrapped about the whip post. Saliva ran into the corners of her mouth from the six teeth. Her white hair reflected the dim sunlight that pierced the green canopy. She was the last of the Pitcairn people.

All film was used up by two o'clock. The last shots were taken of Teta Christian, Tony, and me. On the very last shot Lucy ran from the crowd to stand beside Tony. In that picture her head almost covers Teta's, but the old woman leaned sideways in the wagon and peeked from behind my shoulder.

The engineers moved in. With rotary saws they cut part way through the first tree. Then two bulldozers shoved against the trunk. The great pine broke loose and almost imperceptibly started to fall. As it did so, it caught for a moment, twisted in the air like a soldier shot as he runs forward. The tree twirled, mortally wounded, and fell into a cloud of dust. Three more were destroyed in that manner.

The island people said nothing as their living cathedral was desecrated. The old *Bounty* people watched the felling of the trees

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as simply one more tragedy in the long series their clans had had to tolerate.

"You'll have to move back," the Army engineers said. "We've got to blast the stumps."

We moved to a safe distance and watched the engineers place sticks of dynamite among the roots of each fallen tree. Then a detonator was attached and the wires gathered together at a plunger box. The charge was exploded, but nothing much happened. Just some dirt and dust in the air, with a few fragments of wood. It was not until the bulldozers came back and nudged the stumps that we saw what had happened. The roots had been destroyed. Like old hulks of men who can be pushed and bullied about the slums of a large city, the stumps of Norfolk were pushed and harried into a dump.

I could not go back to Teta's that night. I was lonely, and miserable in my loneliness. I stayed with some Australians who had built their camp near the line of trees. "It's a bloody shime," one of them said in barbarous Anzac cockney. "One bloody line of trees on the island, and we put the bloody airport there!"

Our thoughts were broken by a crashing explosion outside. We rushed to the door of our tent and saw in the moonlight a cloud of dust rising by the trees.

"Fat's in the fire!" an Australian cried.

We hurried across the field to where the explosion had taken place. We found one of the smaller bulldozers blown to bits. Dynamite. "Those dirty bastards!" an Army engineer said. Then, in true military fashion, he got busy proving that it wasn't his fault. He shouted, "These things were supposed to be guarded. Sergeant! Didn't I tell you to have these guarded?" He ran towards some lights shouting, "Sergeant! Sergeant!"

I left the Australians and headed for the stone stables. As I did so, I caught a glimpse of a woman running ahead of me. I hurried as fast as I could and overtook fat Lucy. I grabbed her by the shoulders and started to shake her, but she burst into a heavy flow of tears and blubbered so that I could make nothing of her answers. I turned, therefore, towards old Teta's house and did so in time to see her door open and close. "Come along, Lucy!" I said. She scuffed her bare feet in the dust behind me.

In Teta's house Fry and the old woman were drinking rum. Teta was not puffing, but she seemed out of breath. Fry had obviously not moved for some time. "My father, Fletcher Christian," Teta said, "always told us that it did not matter whether you lived on Norfolk Island or Pitcairn Island so long as you lived in the love of God. My mother did not believe this. She said that this island was very good for people who had never lived

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on Pitcairn. But she could not see how a little more food and steamers from Australia could make up for the life we had on Pitcairn. She said that she would rather live there, on the cliff by the ocean, than anywhere else in the world. But when my father died at sea, she had a chance to go back to her home on Pitcairn. A boat was going there. I begged her to go on the boat, and take us all. But she said, 'No. Fletcher is buried out there at sea. My place is here.'"

The old woman droned on and on until it was obvious to me that she was drunk again from too much of Tony's rum. Towards morning she left us and went into her bedroom. I sat drumming my fingers on the table and Tony said, "Come on! We'll drive Lucy home."

"I don't want to go home!" she cried.

"Get in the jeep!" Tony commanded, adding in a low voice, "You've done enough for one night."

The crazy girl climbed in behind us.

"So she blew up the bulldozer?" I asked.

"That's right," Tony said sleepily. "She and Teta."

"Fry," I said coldly. "Those two women could never in a million years figure out how to explode dynamite."

"It was an old bulldozer anyway," Fry said as we drove back to Teta's. "Something somebody at home didn't want. Commander, I can just see him, rubbing his hands and saying, 'Look! I can sell it to the guv'mint. Make money on the deal, too. And it's patriotic! You can't beat a deal like that!' Well, his tractor did a lot of good."

"We need that bulldozer for the airstrip."

"I don't think you do," Tony replied. "As a matter of fact, I'm damned sure you don't. Because that's the one that broke down this afternoon and the Army man said it couldn't be fixed." He brought the jeep to a stop by Teta's fence.

"Fry," I said. "You could be court-martialled for this."

Tony turned to face me. "Who would believe you?" he asked.

"By God, man," I said grimly. "If I had the facts I'd press this case."

"With whom?" he asked. "With Ghormley? With Admiral Kester? You tell your story. Then I'll tell mine. Can you imagine the look on Kester's face? There was an old, useless bulldozer. A couple of women blew it up as a last gesture of defiance. A woman of ninety and a crazy girl. That story wouldn't stand up. Especially if I said how you came here to do a job and just couldn't make up your mind to knock down a few trees. It's too fantastic, Commander. Kester would never believe that."

"I could understand your helping them, in peacetime," I said. "But this is war."

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"That's when people need help, Commander!" Fry said quietly. "Not when everything is going smoothly."

"It's all so damned futile," I said, looking away towards the stone stables. "Blowing up one bulldozer."

"Commander," Fry said with quiet passion. "These people on Norfolk can't be dismissed lightly. Some smart scientists can come down here and prove they're all nuts. But do you believe it? We took down a map the other day, Teta and I. We figured where her grandsons are fighting. They're in Africa, Malaya, India, New Guinea, England. They may be stupid, but they know what they want. They knew what they wanted when they knocked Bligh off his ship. The saints knew what they wanted when they went north as missionaries. I'm on their side. If blowing up a broken bulldozer helps keep the spirit alive, that's O.K. with me."

Tony submitted a vague report on the bulldozer. I endorsed it and sent it on to my own files in Noumea. I don't know where it is now. When Fry handed it to me he said, "Doesn't it seem horrible? The trees all down. We don't destroy one single memento of the prison days. Not one building do we touch. The airstrip runs twenty yards from the stone stables, but they're as safe as the Gallows Gate. But the cathedral of the spirit, that we knock to hell."

"My father, Fletcher Christian," Teta said on my last night, when graders were working by flares to speed the airstrip. "He told us that God meant to build Norfolk this way. A man has to love the island to get here, because there are no harbours and no landings. My father said, 'A man has to fight his way ashore on this island!' That's what he was doing when the boat crashed on the rocks. Am I boring you with this, Commander?"

* * *

NO ACCOUNTING FOR TASTE

A young lady sat next to a distinguished bishop at a dinner. For some time she hesitated to speak to him. Then, seeing some bananas passed, she ventured to say:

"I beg your pardon, but are you fond of bananas?"

The bishop was deaf, and, leaning forward, replied:

"What did you say?"

"I said," repeated the young lady, blushing, "are you fond of bananas?"

The bishop thought for a moment and then said: "If you want my honest opinion, I have always preferred the old-fashioned nightshirt."

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ON WITH THE DANCE!

Now is the time for drinking, and now with sportive foot to beat the earth

HORACE, 65–8 B.C., *Odes*

Now silent, now singing and swaying and swinging,
like blossoms that bend to the breezes or showers.
Eyes ravished with rapture, celestially panting,
what passionate bosoms aflaming with fire.

SAROJINI NAIDU, *Indian Dancers*

Sport of Sultans

A thin transparent costume of pale blue, flimsy silk covered her breasts and her long graceful legs. She had pinned back her hair in a tight knot, which seemed to put her soft-brown, oval face in a black shining frame. Over her shoulders she had draped a wisp of the same delicate material and in her teeth she held a rose.

Her skin had a pale brown texture of some beautiful fragile fruit. She was young, maybe seventeen, but her figure had already ripened to maturity in the manner of the East. Her face was like the unmutilated Sphinx on an Egyptian pound note, but there was nothing inscrutable about it. Her deep sloe eyes were wide apart and constantly shaded by a veil of thick black eyelashes; her lips were full and sensuous; and in the magic of her thin, slender hands she held us all enthralled.

Then she halted momentarily in front of my table. Putting her long palms together, she snapped her forefinger against the soft flesh of her left hand like the report of a pistol. A shudder convulsed her body and slowly, sensuously, she began to sway. Ripple after ripple of emotion travelled down her body from her heaving shoulders to her ankles. She seemed lost in a dream of ecstasy, oblivious to the smoke and eager faces around her. Gradually the rhythm reasserted itself, and she writhed the lower part of her body to the tum-tum of the drum. The crowd, relieved from its pent-up excitement, clapped its hands in time with the music. Laughing, she threw the rose at an open-mouthed farmer and cast the scarf from her shoulders.

As the tempo of the music quickened, she moved her hips at a speed almost too fast for the eye to follow. The silk below her waist fluttered as though struck by a strong wind as she slowly shuffled her feet round the floor. All the movement was below her waist now and, fascinated, we could not take our eyes from the passionate

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spell she was weaving. Then again she stopped, facing the tables. She threw back her head and laughed—a wicked, contemptuous laugh as much as to say, " I have you in my power because I know what you are really like." She shook her shoulders so that her soft breasts trembled beneath the silk and, throwing back her head, she laughed again. Fools, all fools, all men are fools! Covering her face with both hands so that her arms formed a graceful bow, she began to sway slowly again to the music, now softer, more insidious. The voices hushed and the clapping ceased, as every pair of eyes was rivèted upon her navel.

I managed to snatch myself away from the attraction of that tortuous, slowly moving area of soft brown flesh to look around at their transfixed faces . . . Their hungry eyes followed every movement as they leaned forward towards her over the tables. Drinks, pipes, cigarettes and other girls were forgotten. This was the magic of the Arabian nights, the sport of the sultans. In their minds they imagined that she was already theirs.

ROY FARRAN, *Winged Dagger*

First Impression

This dance of death which sounds so musically
Was sure intended for the corpse de ballet.

Author Unknown, On the Danse Macabre of Saint-Saëns

Pavlova—The Immortal

On the stage, in *Giselle*, or *The Dying Swan*, she became something translucent, intangible, incorporeal . . . It was no longer the dancer Pavlova; it was Giselle eternally dying and eternally resuscitated, ghostly and imponderable, merging into and out of the loveliness of the white swan. Such was her dying, there on the stage, that one always seemed to be bidding her a last farewell. It was as though only the merest film separated life from death, the woman-dancer from the ghost of a vision. The dream, the fairy legend, were made real by her, and when the film vanished altogether away it was like some natural transition in which her own reality faded into the land of legend. And still her life seems to go on among us, lovely and translucent as ever.

SERGE LIFAR, *Serge Diaghilev, His Life, His Work, His Legend*

Condemnation

She could dance more skilfully than an honest woman need.

SALLUST *Catiline*

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The Seven Veils

HERODIAS: *Let us go within. The voice of that man maddens me. I will not have my daughter dance while he is continually crying out. I will not have her dance while you look at her in this fashion. In a word I will not have her dance.*

HEROD: *Do not rise, my wife, my queen, it will avail thee nothing. I will not go within till she hath danced. Dance, Salome, dance for me.*

HERODIAS: *Do not dance, my daughter.*

SALOME: *I am ready, Tetrarch.* (*Salome dances the dance of the seven veils*).

HEROD: *Ah! Wonderful! Wonderful! You see that she has danced for me, your daughter. Come near, Salome, come near, that I may give you your reward. Ah! I pay the dancers well. I will pay thee royally. I will give thee whatsoever thy soul desireth. What wouldst thou have? Speak.*

OSCAR WILDE, 1856–1900, *Salome*

Constitutional

Upon this whirlpool I embarked with the greatest misgiving and a strange young woman clinging to my person. The noise was deafening. The four black men were now all shouting at once and playing all their instruments at once, working up to the inconceivable uproar of the finale; and all the dancers began to dance with a last desperate fury. Bodies buffeted one from behind, and while one was yet looking round in apology or anger more bodies buffeted one from the flank. It was like swimming in a choppy sea, where there is no time to get the last wave out of your mouth before the next one hits you.

Close beside us a couple fell down with a great crash. I looked at them with concern, but no one else took any notice. On with the dance! Faster and faster the black men played. I was dimly aware now that they were standing on their chairs, bellowing, and fancied the end must be near. Then we were washed into a quiet backwater, in a corner, and from here I determined never to issue till the Last Banjo should indeed sound. Here I sidled vaguely about for a long time, hoping that I looked like a man preparing for some vast culminating feat, a side-step or a buzz or a double-Jazz-spin or an ordinary fall down.

The noise suddenly ceased; the four black men had exploded.

"Very good exercise," my partner said.

"Quite," said I.

A. P. HERBERT, *Light Articles Only*

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★*Can* you *solve the mystery of IRON CHEST, the criminal who vanished like a ghost, taking with him diamonds and bank notes and the sinister chest which gave him his name?*

He had swooped on Brussels, Paris, and now—Tangier. SIR HENRY MERRIVALE, world-famous amateur detective, agreed to help COLONEL DUROC, head of Tangier's international police force, to track down the criminal. Duroc's right-hand man, COMMANDANT JUAN ALVAREZ, fell in love with MAUREEN HOLMES, Sir Henry's secretary. When Maureen did not turn up to have dinner with him, Alvarez got drunk and was absent from duty.

That very night the burglar alarm sounded at a jeweller's in the Grand Socco, and a shadowy figure carrying the iron chest darted from the shop. Sir Henry Merrivale and Colonel Duroc struggled after him; BILL BENTLEY, of the British Consulate, arriving with his wife, PAULA, gave chase, but was shaken off. The figure fired at Paula, and—in the midst of streets now hemmed in by police—he vanished!

Next morning Paula, investigating a flat advertised to let, opened a door and saw a haul of diamonds, and beside them the iron chest. A man came plunging towards her.

The Second Part of

BEHIND THE CRIMSON BLIND

by CARTER DICKSON

SUDDENLY, all Paula's weakness was gone and her mind moved again. Springing back out of the doorway, she slammed the door and even gripped her hands round the knob with some wild, impossible notion of holding it against him.

Iron Chest! Probably she had seen Iron Chest himself! If only somebody were here to help her! If only *somebody* . . .

Then she realized that the red-headed man was not trying to attack her. On the contrary, she could hear a bolt shot into its socket, and a click of a key that further locked the door.

At the same moment, very quietly and swiftly, Commandant Juan Alvarez moved towards her from the other end of the corridor.

"Juan!" whispered Paula. Her knees trembled with relief.

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Today Alvarez wore full military uniform, with Sam Browne belt and gold leaf on his cap. On his hands were brown gloves of light leather. Though his red-brown eyes were still faintly bloodshot, like those of a man who had passed a bad night, yet they were clearing to brightness.

"You were in no danger, Mrs. Bentley," he said gently, and smiled.

"But he's probably Iron Chest! He has red hair. He . . ."

"I'm afraid not, Mrs. Bentley. The man's name is G. W. Collier. We believe him to be the accomplice of Iron Chest. And he has been followed since he left his hotel at seven this morning. I led the chase myself, without troubling to communicate with Colonel Duroc. . . . You also were followed, but for a different reason. We, too, saw that curious advertisement. You might be in danger. And your bravery is great, Mrs. Bentley."

"But don't you see?" Paula persisted in a fierce whisper. "Whoever he is, he's got the iron chest and—oh, I don't know how many—but at least thirty diamonds!" And quickly she related all that had happened.

Alvarez's eyes flashed open. He snapped his fingers. Down into the corridor hurried three policemen, their white helmets and belts bold against khaki shirts and shorts. In front of them moved Inspector Mendoza, Alvarez's second-in-command, his jaw showing a grim determination.

Inside the big room of the flat Paula imagined, or thought she imagined, very faint sounds she could not identify.

"He cannot get away, Mrs. Bentley," Alvarez said very softly. "A man of ours has stood on the balcony outside ever since he arrived. But diamonds! As real evidence . . ."

The underside of Alvarez's gloved fist struck three hard blows at the door.

"I am a police officer," he said, "holding a warrant for the search of this flat. Open the door!"

Footsteps slowly approached the door. The bolt was shot carelessly back; and, after a deliberate pause, the key was turned. The man with the red hair opened the door wide.

Paula's glance flew to the mahogany table in the middle of the floor. Its crimson velvet cloth, where only a brief time ago had stood the iron chest and rows of diamonds, was now empty except for an ink bottle, a few pens, scattered sheets of writing paper.

Gone. Vanished. Paula felt almost physically sick. But they couldn't have vanished; they must be here. Alvarez remained impassive; his voice, low-pitched, spoke with icy politeness.

"Mr. Collier?" he asked.

"Yeah; that's me."

Under the heavily plastered-down hair, the large face with the flattish nose was quite expressionless. Collier's eyes were so pale that you could see little under the drooping white lids.

He was older than he first appeared; at least forty, probably more. He was an inch or so below the height of Alvarez, though he

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must have weighed six or seven pounds more than Alvarez's middleweight eleven-stone-five. Paula, who knew her athletes from Bill and also from a strong interest in men, estimated that Mr. G. W. Collier was in almost perfect physical training despite his deceptive complexion. Mr. Collier also wore a whitish lounge suit, without waistcoat, but with unnecessary shoulder-padding which made him look bulkier. He had a bow tie, blue with pink spots, and his thumbs were hooked in his belt as he watched without interest.

All this swept through Paula's mind, together with the distinct impression she had seen him somewhere before, in the second before Alvarez could speak again.

"Very well, Mr. Collier," said the Commandant, "I am here to . . ."

"Look, buddy," interrupted Collier, "I don't want any trouble with you boys. You wanted in? Okay, so I let you in."

"Well?"

"But be smart, that's all; just don't make me sore. It's not healthy. Catch on?"

Alvarez looked him up and down.

"Your sensitive feelings, Mr. Collier, are no concern of mine."

Collier, eyelids drooping still further, partly turned as though to address an invisible companion beside him.

"Wise guy," he murmured. "Know what I am? I'm an American citizen." He flipped open the right side of his coat to show the breast pocket. "I got a passport here to prove it."

"Yes?" said the unimpressed Alvarez.

"We're smart, see? America didn't sign any screwy international-zone treaty. But we've got a place called a legation here, to see nobody pulls a fast one. So what?" The corner of Collier's lip turned up. "Why, if I ever pulled a job in this lousy whistle stop, which I haven't, you spicks couldn't do a thing about it. I'd have to be tried by the American Legation."

"Quite true," Alvarez agreed. "You forget, however, that you must first be detained and questioned by the Tangier police."

Alvarez turned his head over his shoulder and spoke in Spanish.

"Inspector Mendoza, remain just outside the door. No object, nothing of any kind, is to leave this room. You others, in here."

The three policemen, impassive, came into the room and stood in a row along the wall beside him, whereupon Alvarez turned back to Collier.

"Now to business. A while ago, on that table, was an iron box two feet long by one foot broad by one foot high, as well as a great number of diamonds . . . How many diamonds, Mrs. Bentley?"

"I didn't have time to count." Paula spoke sweetly. "More than thirty, I'm certain."

For the first time Collier's face muscles moved.

"*What?*" he said, and his rasping tenor went high.

Curtly Alvarez explained. Collier's unpleasant face grew almost pleasant, in the sense that it had qualities of faint amiability and enjoyment under the plastering of dark-fiery red hair. Unhooking

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one thumb from his belt, he slapped his side and again addressed an invisible companion.

"Well, whadda ya know?" he inquired in wonder. He turned back to Alvarez. "I still don't get it. But you've handed me the best laugh of the year. Go ahead and search. I don't even wanna see your warrant, though"—here his eyelids dropped in threat—"I could make plenty trouble for you if I asked to see it."

Instantly Alvarez whipped out the warrant from inside his tunic, and held it spread out in front of Collier.

The latter, lowering his bulky shoulders, studied the document his lips moved a little. Though it was written in French, Paula saw that he could understand it. Yet, when Collier straightened up, he was as unruffled as ever.

"Okay, so you've got a warrant," he said wearily. "How dumb can you get? Go ahead."

"Do you object to a personal search?"

"What have I got to lose?" inquired Collier, and automatically lifted his arms.

Alvarez's hard, competent hands did a thorough job, but he found nothing.

"Satisfied, pal?"

"For the moment, yes. Now go and sit down."

Alvarez made a swift, comprehensive survey of the room. Then he hurried to the right-hand wall, in which the two large windows were covered with crimson wooden shutters and locked with wooden bars. Alvarez unlocked and threw open both windows. Outside each one stood a detective in plain clothes.

"Has anyone entered or left by these windows," he snapped, "since this—this gentleman arrived?"

Both were emphatic in saying "No."

"Has any object or objects, anything whatsoever, been handed or thrown out of these windows since then?"

"Nothing, my Commandant! Nothing at all!"

"Remain at your posts, then. See that nothing is."

Closing and locking the shutters again, Alvarez hurried across to the bathroom at the other side of the room. From where she stood, Paula could see the crimson and locked shutters of the small window facing front. Alvarez opened it, to find a third plain-clothes man, whose denials were emphatically the same as the others.

"Good. Rest there," said Alvarez. He pulled down the frosted-glass window, then closed and locked the shutters.

Alvarez strode to the large mahogany table. He looked across at the three motionless policemen.

"Now go downstairs," he barked out, "fetch your tools, and return. You know what we want. Find it! Find it, if you rip down this flat like a doll's house."

The policemen, breathing hard, almost ran for the closed door to the corridor, outside which waited Inspector Mendoza. They almost ran into Colonel Duroc, marching in.

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ALVAREZ and Paula had gone towards the door, but they moved back as Colonel Duroc entered. Duroc's khaki tunic stuck forward; his cap was a trifle awry; his tufted eyebrows hovered with thunder. Since he had not yet seen Alvarez this morning, he boiled with words for a man who had been blind drunk when on duty.

He opened his mouth, then shut it. Alvarez, clearly, was in such a state of mind that he had forgotten his misdemeanour.

"I thank you, Commandant," said the Colonel, in gruff and formal French, "for having telephoned to me from here. This flat; yes, well? We knew of it. We spoke of it last night, before you . . . that is to say, before this morning. What now?"

Alvarez, in a quick mutter, related the story up to the present.

"But here we have the same story—" began Colonel Duroc, and hesitated. "Then the little Paula, you say, came here to seek an apartment furnished?"

"The little Paula" nodded. "It is true," she assured Duroc in French, and handed him the newspaper with the marked advertisement.

"Pah!" snorted the Colonel, slapping at the folded newspaper. "We have agreed, the Commandant and I, that this is purely a trap, a bait for someone. But not for you, little one!"

"I—I thought not. But why?"

"Regard the words," said Duroc, and again slapped the newspaper. "The price is too low for residents not to be suspicious; clever residents, that is. Ah, pardon! The term 'kitchenette' is American, never used here by the English; seldom by the Americans." He glanced towards Collier. "Above all, regard what is of the most importance: 'Excellent for transients.' Eh? Well! This man Collier, this camel, has prepared a trap for someone. But for whom?"

Outside the closed door to the corridor, there was a dispute of voices. Yanking open the door, Colonel Duroc peered outside, and his mouth opened wide.

"Inspector Mendoza," he snapped, "permit Mademoiselle to enter."

And in walked Maureen Holmes, much surprised and confused, with a copy of the same newspaper.

The Colonel removed his cap for a moment in order to smite his forehead.

"My dear," he groaned, "will you tell me how *you* have in some fashion become involved with Iron Chest? Or why the camel Collier should set a trap for you?"

At the same moment the corridor door banged wide open. In strode the three eager policemen, now followed by a fourth, all laden with a weight of tools ranging from small chisels to long-handled instruments ending in a broad knife-sharp steel blade.

"To work, my brave ones!" Colonel Duroc shouted, both in French and in Spanish. "Go to it!"

And they did, while the door was again firmly closed. Duroc turned to Maureen, and repeated his question.

Maureen groped after her French, but it would not slip glibly.

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"But I don't understand any of it!" she protested, in her own language. "I don't even understand why there's such a rumpus, or why the police are here, or anything at all!"

"You are sure?" persisted Colonel Duroc, also in English. "You have not earn—for instance, it may be—the enmity of this Iron Chest? Or of Collier? You know something?"

"No!" said Maureen. "Colonel Duroc, do you remember late yesterday afternoon on the terrace? Your fat'ma wheeled in a tea wagon with sandwiches on top and the *Gazette* on the shelf underneath. You see, I happened to notice that ad . . ."

"With my eyes," groaned Duroc, "I saw you do it!"

"I'd just decided that Sir Henry was simply *intolerable*, and I thought it would be wonderful to have a little apartment of my own, and eat out. But . . ."

Maureen paused, wrinkling up her smooth forehead.

"But this morning, when I looked into Sir Henry's room," she added, "he was still asleep."

"Ah, that Morpheus!" said Colonel Duroc, in agony. "I too have seen him. Pah! Go on, go on."

"Well, I knew I couldn't really do it," said Maureen. "You and Sir Henry and—and Mr. Alvarez have all been too nice. If you want me to stay, I'm sorry I ever thought of leaving. But I thought I might just as well see the place and go away. That's all."

But it wasn't all. Maureen looked straight into the eyes of Commandant Alvarez.

"Juan—" she began tentatively.

"Maureen!" said Commandant Alvarez, swallowing hard as he tried out the name. "If I could make only one apology out of ten thousand . . ."

"But it doesn't matter . . . I know; Sir Henry told me! We went to different restaurants."

"I should have thought of that! I should have searched! Instead of this, I must go home and get—"

He stopped. Maureen extended both hands, and he gripped them in gloved fingers of such murderous pressure that it must have hurt badly.

"It must not happen again!" said the anguished Alvarez.

"Shut that!" interrupted the Colonel. "I will have no more spoonerisms while there is work to be done. Commandant Alvarez! . . ."

It was Paula who had the inspiration and silenced Duroc. Pushing among them, she rolled open the folding doors of the kitchenette.

"Maureen, this is where we can help!" Paula spoke excitedly. "No, no; don't ask questions! I'll explain as we search. Look here: there hasn't been a bit of food here for weeks!"

"Good!" almost beamed Duroc, speaking again in French. "Commandant Alvarez! A word!" And he drew Alvarez aside. "I will speak to you presently," he said grimly, "of other matters.

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"At Paris, in exactly this position, they found no iron box and no diamonds. We must find them!"

THERE was a *cr-r-ack* of wood as one workman, who had removed the smooth crimson cloth, worked with a small chisel to pry up the mahogany tabletop. Another policeman had hurried into the bathroom, whence issued rattling sounds of a porcelain cistern lid set high. The third policeman, who had raked out the fire with no result whatever, was now putting on a dirty canvas coat to explore the chimney.

Just to the right of the mantelpiece as you faced it stood some long bookshelves, shaky and hastily knocked together by a careless carpenter. Yet they were filled with handsome-looking books of all sizes; and the fourth policeman was whipping them out for a quick examination of each before flinging it on the floor.

"Now what interest," muttered Alvarez, "would Collier have in books?"

G. W. Collier got up from his chair and moved towards Colonel Duroc.

"Look, you with the spinach," he said to Duroc. "You think I don't savvy your frog lingo. That's where you're not smart. Languages!" he was disgusted. "Jeez, why can't everybody talk English!"

"An excellent idea, Mr. Collier," commented Alvarez. "I strongly recommend it to you."

"Look, you with the spinach." Collier turned to Colonel Duroc. "Just don't let your punk here, that talks like a de-ah old Limey, get me too sore."

"You spoke to me, my man?" asked the Colonel, as though smelling something faintly offensive.

"Yeah; sure, 'my man,'" mimicked Collier. Triumphantly he shot out the next: "Ain't I as good as you?"

"No," said the Colonel.

Collier, who clearly had been expecting "Yes,"—an answer far too readily given—did not stop.

"Funny," he said. "I was feeling friendly, too. I just wanted to warn you." The eyelids drooped almost shut. "If your punks keep on busting up my apartment, I could make big trouble for you. Big trouble; catch on? I say I *could*."

"But get this," said Collier, "maybe if you give with a coupla hundred bucks, maybe I'll forget it. I don't say yes; only maybe. You're in big trouble, pal."

Colonel Duroc's eyebrows gathered and lowered.

"Indeed? Do you own this flat? Or lease it?"

"Pal, I just wouldn't know."

"Oh, *I* know," said the Colonel, "having talked by telephone with the owner of the block of flats, M. Jacques Bullier. You rented this place by cable and money order from Lisbon, much less than a fortnight ago. You signed and returned a lease by post. Any damage will be fully paid to the owner. Not to you."

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"Okay; so I got a lease." Collier almost smiled, returning the cigarette to his mouth. "Just business, that's all. I try to outsmart you; you try to outsmart me. No harm in trying."

"Some of us believe," said Colonel Duroc, "that there is great harm in trying."

"Well, I ain't one of 'em."

"No," said the Colonel slowly, "you are not one of them." His tone altered. "Now return to your chair and remain there."

"I think you're cute, too," said Collier. "So is wise guy."

And, letting smoke drift into the Colonel's face, he sauntered away with his prize-fighter's swing.

From the bathroom issued a crash as the metal plug was forced from the bath drain. The policeman at the table had removed the top, explored the hollow legs with a very long and thin steel probe, and was now putting down a police microscope of the kind which can detect any tampering with the solid wood.

"There is nothing in the table, sir," he reported. "Nothing!"

"Very well," said Alvarez. "Push it back against the corridor wall, and investigate this easy chair facing it. As for the roof light over it . . ."

But, glancing upwards, Alvarez could see that the shallow, inverted glass dome had already been unscrewed, showing only a naked bulb.

"Find anything?" called Collier from his corner.

Ignoring this, Alvarez strode towards the mantelpiece.

At the same moment, the policeman in the grimy canvas hood and jacket ducked out from under the chimney, amid a rattle and shower of soot.

"No good," he growled, spitting soot. "Up there, not far, very close, is a crossed-iron grating. Fixed there. Not to be moved."

"And the bricks?"

"Secure, Commandant. I tried them. Nothing hidden anywhere here. See for yourself."

Taking the electric torch, Alvarez thrust his head up the chimney, played the beam of the torch upwards, and knew it.

"Very well, Abou Owad! Fetch a stepladder, and our biggest magnifying lens. Search every inch of these walls for a hidden cavity."

"Find anything?" drawled Collier.

Alvarez whipped round to the shaky unpainted lines of bookshelves. The man who searched them had finished, and was now knocking apart a straight chair. Many of the books he had left on the shelves, but most he had merely thrown to the floor. Alvarez glanced over every title, with mounting surprise. Though large or small, plain or decorated, in every language, each book was a copy of the Bible.

"Find anything?" asked Collier. "Yeah, wise guy; that's my job. If you'd seen the card I filled out, you'd have got smart. I'm a Bible salesman."

Alvarez closed his eyes.

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"You'd be surprised," said Collier. "Educated Mohammedans know our Bible as well as we do. Don't kid yourself: best-selling book on earth."

"And that, of course, is the reason for reading it?"

"Why not? I got ideals. Friendship, everybody happy, no wars—that kind of stuff. Them's ideals. I got 'em."

In the middle of the room, the first policeman was now gutting the easy chair with a long knife, and working the legs loose. Mr. G. W. Collier, seeking amusement, held a burning cigarette tightly between thumb and second finger. He flicked it forward, straight and hard, and the lighted end struck the policeman on the cheek. Then it bounced down and burnt acridly against the carpet.

For an instant the policeman stood motionless, head and helmet down, gripping the sides of the chair. You could see his heavy biceps and corded wrists strain out against the arms of the khaki shirt. Suddenly he whirled round towards Collier.

"*Ce fils de putain* . . ." he shouted.

Instantly Alvarez was beside him. "*Doucement, mon vieux*," he muttered, and whispered a few words at the side of his companion's helmet. The policeman's eyes glistened, and he subsided.

"I'm sorry, Juan," came the shaken voice of Paula, "but there isn't a single thing hidden in this kitchenette."

"Find anything?" asked Collier.

Colonel Duroc, who had been standing near the group at the kitchenette, wore a white mottled face of nervousness and near-collapse.

"We must find them," he kept muttering. "We *must*."

NOW the search ran fast to its close. Agent of Police Abou Owad darted round with his stepladder, scrutinizing every inch of the walls and then the ceiling. The Spanish policeman from the bathroom hurled away the carpet and went over a floor of solid concrete.

Alvarez, scarcely knowing what he did, kicked savagely at burned coals and heavy bits of ash: he kicked the handirons; he almost kicked a fallen Bible. Colonel Duroc stood with head turned aside.

Slowly a silence, of hearts and minds as well as hammerings, gathered in the room. It was the Spanish policeman who spoke out a sentiment in most minds.

"Commandant," he said in French, "in the bathroom that *lavabo* does not march; the chain to the plunger in the cistern has not been used for weeks or months; it is broken and even corroded. Nothing is hidden down the drain of the tub or the wash basin. Nothing hidden anywhere!"

Voices in many languages volleyed out.

"Nothing hidden anywhere!"

"These things, in effect—have vanished."

"One little moment!" cried a white-faced Colonel Duroc. "One place alone you have not searched. That is the chair in which the man Collier has been sitting all this time."

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Collier, who had been lighting still another cigarette, raised filmed eyes.

"It's all yours, spinach," he said, moving up his thick shoulders.

Three policemen, with knife, upholstery tools, and microscope, flung themselves at the chair. A tension of nerves grew so taut that Maureen pressed one hand over Paula's mouth. At last the chair, fully gutted and closely examined, lay on its back; and there was nothing.

At last Collier condescended to laugh out loud when he looked at Alvarez. "You're licked, wise guy," he sneered. "You haven't got a thing on me, and you know it."

AND then, in black despair when all but one were ready to concede defeat, the atmosphere subtly altered and the luck began to flow the other way. For the first time since Alvarez had entered the flat, Paula heard the Commandant let out the full power of his voice.

"I am not at all convinced of that, Mr. Collier," said the Commandant. "You fool! We have not even begun to show our evidence!"

Collier, lounging against the wall near one crimson shutter, merely breathed out smoke.

"You still don't get it, wise guy. I can't be bothered with you saps much longer. I've gotta go out . . ."

Colonel Duroc's voice, now cold and calm, struck in.

"You will not be permitted to leave here," he said.

"So I won't?" asked Collier softly. "So there'll be plenty big trouble at the legation, when I spill it. Suit yourself."

Alvarez made a gesture which made even his Colonel pause.

"Are you a betting man, Mr. Collier?" he asked in English and with a voice which seemed inspired of the devil. "If so, I will accept any wager you care to offer that within fifteen minutes we shall have enough evidence to take you away in handcuffs."

There was a buzz among the policemen, who were required to speak French, Spanish, and Arabic, but not English. One who evidently knew a little of the last-named language was hissing an explanation. And Colonel Duroc unobtrusively plucked at the Commandant's sleeve.

"Alvarez!"

Their whispered talk, in French, did not carry to another person in the room.

"Alvarez, is this a bluff?"

"No, sir. I never bluff, and I despise those who do."

Clearly Alvarez could not see that Duroc was inwardly raging, all against the Commandant. More bitter in the Colonel's mind was Alvarez's dereliction of duty last night; bitterest of all, the vanishing of the diamonds now, which he also blamed on Alvarez. Colonel Duroc was not himself.

"Continue, Alvarez," he said huskily.

"I was not present at the conference between you and Sir Henry Merrivale on the terrace at your home . . ."

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"Ah! If I could but lay my hands on that sleeping beauty!"

"Pardon, sir. You had decided that this man Collier, a diamond cutter, was the accomplice of Iron Chest; and that Iron Chest himself slipped invisibly from the scene. Sir, sir," pleaded Alvarez, "your deductions were admirable and had sound reason . . ."

"You flatter both of us," murmured the Colonel.

"But your main deductions, I respectfully submit, must remain suppositions and not facts. I believe this man Collier *is* Iron Chest himself; that there was no second person. Using sheer daring—always his weapon—he walked straight through our immigration and customs as he did through Lisbon. Sir, may I be allowed to pin him down?"

Though Duroc spoke no more curtly, the inside of his mind grew blacker. "You may," he said. "But my position, as well as administrative, is also diplomatic. If you make one mistake—"

"Thank you, sir," said Alvarez, and turned on his heel and swung round.

The policemen, whispering and gesticulating, were now drawn up in a long line across the front of the fireplace. Paula and Maureen, by some commonly shared impulse, stood with their backs to the kitchenette sink. Alvarez's footsteps struck hard on the concrete as he strode to the middle of it.

"If I speak in English," he said clearly, "it is because I wish," he nodded towards Collier without referring to him, "clearly to understand every word I say." Now he did look at the thick figure in the whitish suit. "Mr. Collier," he added pleasantly, "much depends on certain questions I should like to ask you."

Still lounging against the wall, Collier turned his head and in a dreary way let smoke fall out of his mouth. "Now look! You think I never been around? You think I was never on the witness stand?"

"Quite often, I should imagine."

"And you're not kidding, either. You got some questions for me? Okay, smart guy. Give."

"Thank you," said Alvarez. He pointed to Maureen's copy of the *Gazette*, still clutched in the Colonel's hand.

"Can you deny," asked Alvarez, in a slightly different voice, "it was you who put that advertisement, about leasing this flat, in yesterday's *Tangier Gazette?*"

"Pal, I just wouldn't know. And you couldn't prove a thing."

"No?" said Alvarez, instantly producing more documents. "You sent it to the newspaper three days ago, by cable and money order when you first ordered the flat, from Messrs. Cook's main office in Lisbon. You asked for the advertisement to appear yesterday. When you were interrogated at the airport, you of course were secretly photographed. A radio-photo was sent to Lisbon last night. This morning a cable," he held up the cable, "identifies you as the man who sent the advertisement to the *Gazette*. Do you deny this?"

Again Collier regarded him with a fishy half-smile.

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"So I get me a room at a hotel. So I get me an apartment, too, and then think maybe that's not so good. Having both, see? So I wanna sublet the apartment." Collier's pale eyes opened wide, in a simulation of real interest. "Say, Counsellor, is any of them things a crime?"

"This flat was a trap. Which of these young ladies did you try to trap—Mrs. Bentley or Miss Holmes?"

Collier put his head on one side.

"Look. I never seen either of 'em before. Shove it. They tried to bust in; one of 'em did bust in."

Collier lifted his hand, and also his padded shoulders.

"So you wanna talk about diamonds and iron chests?" Now his flat nostrils grew wider. "So what? Did you get 'em? Jeez, what a rotten lawyer *you'd* make. Why, even this cable—" Casually he stretched out his hand.

"*Don't touch those papers, swine!*"

Then Collier's tenor voice went high.

"So you *want* trouble, wise guy?"

"Yes!" roared Alvarez. Instantly his heavy voice sank to a polite, suave growl. "But not until you have answered another question, Mr. Collier."

"So the poor sap wants a question," said Collier to his invisible companion. "Ain't I done enough to help him? But okay, wise guy, give."

"What is your nationality, Mr. Collier?"

"Didn't I tell you? I'm an American citizen!"

"Er . . . naturalized, of course?"

"Now palsy-walsy is being funny. What are you trying to slip me, palsy-walsy?"

"Because you are not like any real American I have ever met," said Alvarez. "And I have met many. You are the jabberwock fake American, whom we find as a rule only in films and cheap fiction . . . . May I see your passport, please?"

NO doubt Alvarez imagined he was keeping a straight, pleasant face. But one thing perhaps he was not aware of and could not control: his expression of sheer contempt.

"Maybe I'm funny, in a way," drawled Collier, his head still on one side. "But I just kind of don't like the look on your pan, see? I just don't like being looked at as if I was dirt."

Alvarez was puzzled.

"But what else are you?" he asked.

Dead silence.

Then the blood rushed into Collier's face, and all his languid airs flew apart. Fists clenched, lightly balanced, he fired a straight, hard left jab at Alvarez's face.

Joy shone in the Commandant's eyes. Contemptuously slipping the punch, Alvarez countered with a murderous right cross to the side of Collier's jaw. Instantly, his footwork too fast to see, Alvarez drove an even harder left hook—his deadliest weapon—to the other

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side of Collier's jaw. The two blows seemed to whack almost together, like chops on meat.

"Oh, well done!" Paula blurted out uncontrollably.

From the policemen came a roar and stamping of delight.

As the left hook whacked home, a film as of vacancy slid over Collier's eyes. He reeled back four steps to the right, wildly tried to steady himself from falling left; then instinctively he fell on his right knee, right hand supporting himself against the concrete, head down, until a referee might have counted to eight and just on the word of nine. Then his heavy body bounced up, the film cleared from his eyes.

The casual sneer was still on his face. "I get it," he said to Alvarez. "You box. Fancy Dan stuff. I don't; I fight. If we ever tangle for keeps," and his left upper lip curled up in disdain, "remember I just keep coming on, just keep coming on, till I land one punch. And what'll you be? Hamburger; that's what."

Alvarez snapped his fingers, looking at Collier.

"May I see your passport, please?"

Momentarily Collier hesitated. "Why not?"

Drawing the green passport from his inside pocket, he threw it at Alvarez, who caught it neatly.

"What's so wrong about being naturalized?" Collier demanded.

"Nothing whatever, if you are a credit to your adopted country . . . Ah, here we have it," said Alvarez. "'Place of birth: Moscow, Russia. Date of birth—'" Alvarez paused, thoughtfully tapping a gloved finger on the passport. "He was naturalized, I see, at the earliest date permitted by American law. Even within that time, he could not have learned such fluent gutter language in the United States. His gutter manners also he could have found elsewhere." Alvarez's face showed faint disgust.

"Commandant Alvarez!" interrupted the Colonel sharply.

"Sir?"

Colonel Duroc's voice had an odd sound—cold, hard, yet with a strangled quality.

"All this," he said, "has no concern with our affair." He nodded towards Collier. "This . . . gentleman is the naturalized citizen of a friendly power—"

"Sir, the Americans will only laugh at him! Let them speak to him for one minute, and they will know him for the fake and undoubted crook he is."

"The Soviet Union also," said Duroc in a fierce voice, "is a . . . friendly power, friendly to the government we serve. Do you understand?"

Alvarez bowed slightly.

Paula Bentley glanced towards Maureen beside the kitchenette sink. Though both Paula and Maureen could understand the diplomatic beehive of a police commissioner in Tangier, they were bewildered by his suppressed rage, like rusty clockwork at the back of his throat.

"Furthermore," snapped Colonel Duroc, glancing at his wrist

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watch, " you promised to produce evidence, within fifteen minutes, of Mr. Collier's guilt in theft or attempted murder. You have not done so, and your time runs out. Well ? "

" Ah, the evidence ! " said Alvarez, snapping his fingers as though at some half-forgotten trifle. Whereupon he became very straight and formal. " With your permission, Colonel, I will now produce that evidence . . . Mrs. Bentley ! "

" Yes, Juan ? " answered Paula, in her softest and sweetest voice.

" Mrs. Bentley," Alvarez began gently, facing her from in front of the fireplace, " will you look at this man, please ? "

This time Paula did gasp, but it was no stab of fear ; it was merely repulsion as she saw the indomitable Collier, with his sneering face and his thumbs hooked in his belt.

" When you and I came into this flat, Mrs. Bentley, it seemed to me that you several times looked at him as though wondering where you had seen him before. Is that correct ? "

" It is, Ju—Commandant," said Paula.

" Observe, in the presence of witnesses, that I do not attempt to suggest anything to you, or put words into your mouth. Did anything else happen later ? "

" Oh, yes."

" What was it ? "

" I definitely and clearly remembered where I had seen him before."

" Will you explain that, Mrs. Bentley ? "

" For the most part, it was a gesture."

" Go on, please."

Paula was quite cool, except for a pulse throbbing somewhere.

" Miss Holmes and I," she went on, " were standing facing the kitchenette. You and Colonel Duroc had your backs to us, facing out into the room, when that man "—she nodded towards Collier—" with a cigarette in his mouth . . ."

" Yes, Mrs. Bentley ? "

" I turned round," said Paula, " while you were talking. He took the end of the cigarette out of his mouth, and pointed the lighted end at Colonel Duroc with an awfully odd kind of gesture, like this." She extended her arm and wrist, turning them partly upwards in a snakelike motion. " That was when I remembered everything."

" Explain that, please ! "

" It was the movement of his gun hand," said Paula, " when it came up over the iron chest and fired two shots at me last night. He was only four feet away. There was a street light not far from his face, and I can now remember his face distinctly. He had a hat on, concealing that red hair. And those padded shoulders are deceptive ; he was wearing a thin suit. But I know his face. Whether or not he's Iron Chest, he's the man who tried to rob Bernstein and Company last night."

Alvarez turned to the Colonel. " Do we need more evidence than this identification, sir ? "

Then Collier's rasping tenor again soared high.

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"Why, the lying little floosie!" he screamed. "I'll cut the tramp's throat out for this!"

Alvarez, turning back to him, whipped the glove off his left fingers with his right hand. With all the power of his arm he slashed the glove across Collier's left cheek; then, back-hand, across Collier's right cheek.

"Though you are only a fat coward," Alvarez said loudly, "will *that* make you fight?"

Collier, who was certainly not fat and possibly not a coward, squared again to throw his left. Only in Alvarez's delighted eyes could you see he meant to go for the body, left and right, with a flurry of piston-rod belly punches.

But both men were stopped, rigid, by a terrible voice.

"*Commandant! Assez! Assez, je dis! Venez ici!*"

The little Colonel stood with feet planted wide, uniform tunic stuck out, hands gripped behind his back.

"Commandant," he said, "once more I speak English so that our men will not understand." He forgot one of the policemen. "Let me now give judgment on you. Your 'identification' evidence might, or in my opinion would not, be valuable in a court of justice . . ."

"Colonel, that's absurd!" cried Paula Bentley.

The little Colonel gave her a glance, but spoke to Alvarez. "Let us consider your record, Alvarez. Last night you have commit the most serious offence known to the Department of Police. When supposedly on duty, when you might yourself have caught a dangerous criminal, *étant noir* . . . that is, you are black drunk and incapable. Even last night I meditate on whether you shall be only demoted, or dismissed from a duty of which you are not capable."

"Sir, you must know I bitterly apologize for that!"

"I do not want your apologies," said Colonel Duroc curtly. "Do not speak. *I* will speak.

"Well, I pass over small matters, as when you and—and Mr. Collier exchange blows. He is the aggressor; you are correct to strike back. But then what do you do? In the presence of witnesses, as I have tell you, you insult a friendly power of our Government. And lastly—"

The breath whistled through Duroc's nostrils. His fingernails, on hands gripped behind his back, dug blood from the flesh.

"Lastly, Commandant! Because you are annoyed, you have take off your glove and splash on this man's face, daring him to fight. Why? Because you think you can beat him to a jelly. *Merde, alors!* Now you give him the chance to say to all that the police of Tangier used the methods of what they call third degree. This is not true, and well you know it. Very well! If you wish to remain in my service in any capacity, I now give you your order!"

Whereupon the Colonel completely lost his head. He pointed at Collier. "You will publicly apologize to that man, now! And in full!"

Up went Collier's high, sneering laugh.

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"Better listen to the Colonel, wise guy," he said. "He's the McCoy. And crawl. That's what I wanna see."

Alvarez slowly turned and pointed towards Collier.

"Apologize to *that?*" he asked wonderingly.

"You will obey my order, Commandant!"

"Excuse me one moment, sir."

Turning his back on the Colonel, Alvarez walked with ringing steps towards the corridor wall. Pushed back against the wall was the big mahogany table, now with only three legs put back and its cover placed on shakily like a lid. But round it on the floor were still a few sheets of writing paper. Snatching up one, he tried to balance it on the unsteady tabletop. He drew out a fountain pen and wrote several lines quickly but unsteadily before Colonel Duroc's voice cut across the room.

"Alvarez! What the devil are you doing?"

Alvarez signed his name. He blew on the paper and shook it in the air to dry the ink. He marched back and handed the paper to Colonel Duroc.

"It is my resignation from the Department of Police, sir," he said, "to take effect at once. You find it in order, I hope?"

"Quite in order," answered the Colonel, taking the paper and running his eye down it. He folded it up and put it into his trouser pocket. "There might be formalities, but I waive them."

"Thank you, sir. And now . . ."

And now burst out the loudest clamour yet heard in that red-shuttered room.

"Colonel," said Paula, "you're behaving like a foolish little boy. What's happened to the nice, pleasant person I used to know?"

"Please, Colonel!" begged Maureen. "I know it's none of my business. But I'll just bet you I can tell what it is. Because Sir Henry's still asleep, and you couldn't find the diamonds"—here Colonel Duroc winced—"you were furious and took it out on poor Juan. What better detective do you want? He found the criminal, didn't he?"

Paula, inspired, turned to Maureen without letting go the Colonel's arm.

"Darling, that's exactly it! I *can* identify that man. It's true! Colonel Duroc must know any court will accept it. Instead of admitting it . . ."

Whereupon, the angry policemen crowded up and pinned a protesting Alvarez between themselves and Colonel Duroc.

"It's a good thing, eh?" jeered the heavily muscled one, in French. "You lose your best man because he catches your criminal. *Vive la logique.*"

"Allah will not bless you for this, lord of policemen!"

"*Silence!*" shouted Colonel Duroc.

The little Colonel stood among them, hands still locked behind his back, showing a very real dignity.

"It is possible," his English began to slur, "that perhaps quite already in this affair I 'ave been too pasty." He shifted into French.

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"Pah, but that Alvarez! That villain!! He deserves the bastinado, the water torture, the . . . Alvarez! Where the devil are you?"

"Standing immediately in front of you," retorted the villain in question, looking down at him.

"Well! Your orders—"

Alvarez smiled broadly.

"You forget, sir, that I am no longer under your damned orders. I am a civilian. Therefore I propose to that 'Mr. Collier' . . ."

Swinging round, shoving past the policeman, Alvarez took two steps and stopped short. He looked wildly round the room. So did everybody else, after a moment.

Collier was not there.

Alvarez raced for the only door, and threw it open. Outside—a fine, lean, handsome figure of a man, though hesitant and not over-bright—stood Inspector Mendoza, patiently waiting.

"Inspector Mendoza!" Alvarez's throat was thick, but he tried to clear it. "You have not permitted anyone to leave here? A man, pretending to be an American, with a white-grey suit and an unspeakable bow tie?"

"Pr-pretending?" Mendoza answered his Spanish. "But, Commandant! The gentleman *was* American. And very pleasant. He showed me his passport, with photograph. He told me you would or could not detain him, since all Americans are answerable only to their own legation. And this is true, is it not?"

Alvarez stood motionless.

"No matter," he said at last. "I have been the stupid one, my friend."

LATE that afternoon, amid the noise of the Little Socco, Maureen Holmes and Juan Alvarez sat at a round iron table amid many before the dirty fly-specked windows of a café. They drank the vilest coffee ever brewed.

Alvarez now wore a sombre grey suit of London cut instead of his uniform, but no hat. His elbows were on the table, head lowered, hands clasped over his ears. He was in that blackest of depressions which can be felt only when the Latin temperament is armoured by a British training which will not allow him to show it.

"Well, I have failed," he said. "I attempted to show that by my own hard work I could attain a good position. Now it becomes merely comic. I have lost my job."

Maureen opened the catch of her handbag.

"I—I have a little money," she said, powerfully embarrassed. "If you need . . ."

For a short space she thought he had not heard her. Then he turned his head and regarded Maureen with a strange expression, as though she were something holy.

"You would do that?" he asked wonderingly. Then he smiled, a genuine smile, and snapped shut the clasp of her purse. "Put it away, little one. Of that, at least, there is no need. I have more money than any man can possibly spend in his lifetime. Yet deeply

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I thank you for—for . . ." He paused. "We know so little of each other, you and I."

"I—I didn't want to ask," said Maureen, who in fact was burning with curiosity but restrained herself. "After all, we haven't had much time, have we?"

"No," mused Alvarez. "No." He smiled again. "But I have little to tell. You see, I am a Spanish Royalist. When our last King was driven from the country—was it in '30, or '31?—I was a mere boy. They sent me to England, where we had powerful relatives."

Here Alvarez's gaze wandered away into a dream.

"I remember a large house in Eaton Square, and a stately butler who corrected my pronunciation with unobtrusive courtesy. For a time I had a private tutor. Then I was sent to . . ."

Maureen spoke the first words that came into her mind.

"Eton and Oxford?"

"No, no, no," said Alvarez, taking the question very seriously. "Rugby and Sandhurst. I wished to be trained for the Army. Before I had finished Sandhurst I became a naturalized British subject, though, I hope, with more credit to my adopted country than Collier is to yours." He made a wry face. "I served with the British Army for six years. That is almost all; and little enough, I think.

"Oh, but for one thing," he added, turning back and again looking into her eyes. "I would always be open with you, little one. My Christian name really is Juan. But my surname is not Alvarez." Inside his eyes was a fierce pride so deep that it did not show on the surface. "I am not at all ashamed of my true name, Maureen. It has been known to Spain—yes, and to all the world!—for over eight hundred years."

Shrugging his shoulders, Alvarez attempted a smile but failed.

Maureen had not the slightest intention of blurting out the words she spoke then. They were not even in her mind, she believed, an instant before.

"I suppose you've known a lot of women?" she asked.

Alvarez looked startled.

"Yes, of course," he answered. Then his expression changed altogether. "But you—that is different . . . That is another thing . . . That is—"

Now he was in worse plight. Turning back, he lifted a cup of cold coffee and slowly drank it to the dregs.

Maureen felt cold all over. Why didn't he speak? She felt miserable, and hoped he would change the subject. Alvarez did.

"Thus you understand," he was saying, in a matter-of-fact tone, "that the pleasure of being Commandant of Police was only for its work and its prestige. Now I am free! Now I can become a private detective, and track down Collier for myself."

Maureen was now bitterly sorry he had changed the subject, but the possible danger to Alvarez drove it momentarily from her mind.

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"You don't mean . . .?" her voice died away.

"Yes, of course. I have a little grudge to settle."

"But won't that be horribly dangerous?"

"Maureen, my dear," and both of them started slightly when he said that, "what else have I been doing for the past four years? Believe me, there are characters a dozen times tougher here in Tangier than this sneering Collier even believes he is. But don't you realize who is in the deadliest danger of all?"

"Who?"

"Mrs. Bentley, of course!" He rapped his knuckles on the table. "She alone can identify Collier as would-be thief and attempted murderer. I myself think he is Iron Chest, and the only Iron Chest, but others think differently. In any case, he is closely allied with Iron Chest. He will not hesitate to kill Mrs. Bentley, as he promised."

"Collier," continued Alvarez, his eyes nearly closed and his mind concentrated on other matters, "is now a fugitive on the run. Every net has gone out. His photograph will be known to every hotel, every bank, every money changer, every drinking house. But there are so many crooked small hotels, crooked money changers, criminal dives, that he may have gone to earth already."

"Then whatever can they do?"

"Mrs. Bentley must be protected every moment of the day and night. Outside her hotel, of course, she will be preceded at some distance by a plain-clothes detective and followed at the same distance by another. But this is not good enough."

"What *is* good enough?"

"Bill Bentley, her husband," Alvarez's look was grimly appreciative, "has got leave from his consulate to be at her side, in the literal sense, every minute.

"Collier, when I searched him this morning, was not armed. He will be armed now. But so will Bill. And God help Collier if he tries gunplay. Bill is the best pistol shot in Tangier."

"Do you know," said Maureen, "that's the first time—well, perhaps except for myself—I've ever heard you call anybody by his or her first name?"

"I like Bill," Alvarez said simply. "You have met him?"

"Oh, yes. He was up on the terrace late yesterday afternoon. Easy going, rather slow-moving boy in a long raincoat and an absurd conical straw hat, to keep the evil-minded engine of his car from spitting oil at him even after it died." Here Maureen laughed loudly, from sheer strained nerves. "He talked about wanting to join the detectives, or something."

"Well, he has had his wish," agreed Alvarez, and brooded. His tone grew light, almost joking. "I myself, of course, shall stalk them everywhere in my rôle of private detective. Should it come to fighting with fists . . ."

"Can't Bill handle that?"

"In my opinion, he could slaughter Collier in one round. Yes; say three minutes. Bill is as fast inside the ring as he is slow outside

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it. He is careless with his guard. But he has a death in his left hand and pure high explosive in his right."

"Then why—why?—must *you* get into more trouble?"

"Because, as I told you, I have a score to settle. I would give a hundred thousand pounds—and I mean that, little one—to face Collier for one minute. Three, I think, would not be necessary."

Alvarez meditated.

"Confound it, little one! It should be a fairly simple matter to protect Mrs. Bentley, if they are careful. Never must she go into the Old Quarter. No, they would never let her go there! Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless," answered Alvarez, "Colonel Duroc received precise information as to where Collier had gone to earth. Then they might send Mrs. Bentley as bait."

"But they wouldn't dream of doing that, surely?"

Maureen, in the midst of pictured horrors which were to come all too true, now saw Alvarez in the most unusual mood of all. Mirth, beginning in his lean stomach and shaking from his ribs up to his shoulders and then into tears of joy, threatened to whoop out.

"Oh, Juan, please behave yourself! What's wrong now?"

"Oh, *brulez-moi!*" he whispered.

MAUREEN looked wildly to the right and at first saw nothing. True, the Little Socco was strangely quiet except for low, deep murmurs of respect and humility. Each head in a red tarbush, each head in hooded *jalebah*, each bare head or head in the modern hat of a pious Moslem, bent a little in awe. They pressed back against walls on either side, offering open passage to something, which slowly approached down the little street. It was a sedan chair.

Alvarez could have told her it was a Spanish sedan chair, late eighteenth century, broad and strong with heavy shafts, notable for its outside tapestry work and gold nail heads; and that it came from the collection in the Museum at Lisbon.

Now it was borne by four brawny Arabs, two in the shafts in front and two in the shafts at the back, their faces rapt with holiness and their bare feet slapping the dust at a snail's walk. Maureen caught a glimpse of the holy man in the sedan chair. On his head, somewhat rakishly, he wore the green tarbush which is the symbol of the pilgrimage to Mecca. His large brown face was lordly, yet deeply sad as with long meditation on the world. Under his nose was a spreading white moustache, though insignificant compared with the broad white beard which rippled down over his thick robe of subdued yet rich colour.

"Juan!" said Maureen. "But that's . . ."

Her second glance had shown that the patriarch wore large shell-rimmed spectacles. From one corner of his mouth projected upwards, at a forty-five degree angle, a long black cigar.

"Juan," pleaded Maureen, "he'll get into trouble. Suppose they find out he isn't what he seems? I mean . . . a holy man from Mecca?"

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"The sons of Islam are proud that any man should wear their emblem. Still, the green one . . ." Alvarez's eyes narrowed, and he stood up. "Follow me."

Feeling like one who clutches at the coat-tail of a comet, Maureen hurried after him as he strode forward, shoulders back. Uniform or not, all in the Little Socco recognized the terrible Commandant.

Alvarez approached the sedan chair of Sir Henry Merrivale—whose identity can no longer be concealed. Making a bow of deference, Alvarez spoke for a few seconds in Arabic.

"What did you say?" whispered Maureen, clutching at his shoulder.

"I said," muttered Alvarez, without opening his mouth, "that the holy man for his own safety must not travel in a place so crowded, lest he receive injury."

"*Ik moogle ik*," the holy man intoned into his beard. "*Hi-ho-kafoozalum*. Lemme alone, can't you?"

Alvarez raised his head and his voice.

"The venerable one has spoken," he said. "The venerable one has a little torn place in his robe, which he wishes to be mended by a tailor, even an infidel tailor." Alvarez improvised. "Let this conveyance," he commanded, "be turned round the other way."

The very solemn-faced bearers (Arabs are natural actors) instantly whipped the sedan chair completely round, so that the rear bearers now faced the front.

"Forward!" said Alvarez.

While the crowd pressed back or flowed away, the procession marched back up the same narrow street. Alvarez called a halt about thirty paces up.

"Here," he said to the bearers in Arabic, then, "Be pleased to descend, O patriarch. We are here . . . Let the conveyance await us outside."

The patriarch yanked himself loose from the seat, and moved out in stern dignity between the shafts. His robe, a really fine one of some thick material lined with silk, was a wine-dark red with trimmings of white and silver at breast and sleeves, the gentleness of its slope concealing much of his corporation and covered by the beard stretching below his waist.

Emerging from the shafts, he glanced evilly at the rather large shop front. As always in this quarter, it was also dingy and bore the enamel letters, "René Taupin: English Tailor." Below it explained in French, "Formerly of High-Life Tailors, Paris." H.M. raised his hand in blessing to anyone in sight, and pushed open the door.

"After you, little one," Alvarez said to Maureen, and followed her.

THE premises of M. René Taupin were gloomy but fairly spacious. Out at the visitors blew every thick fragrance of the old clothes man. A very long row of suits hung on the right, jackets and topcoats on the left, and down the centre ran tables of shirts and socks of such insufferably loud colours that H.M.'s eyes began to gleam. But now he glared at Alvarez from under the adhesive eyebrows, and

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clutched at a handful of beard, as he dropped his cigar on the floor and trod it out.

"What's the game, hey?" he thundered. "Why do I get scooped off the Little Socco like a Jermyn Street tart? Lord love a duck, I ought to get a medal for the work I've done today!"

Alvarez was at his most formal.

"I deeply regret it, Sir Henry. But it is best that you do not wear that green tarbush in public, or even the disguise in general."

H.M. reached up one finger behind his skull and tilted the green tarbush forward on his head, leaving exposed a bald patch unstained by the walnut juice on his face.

"What's the matter with this tile?" he asked hotly. "I got it through co-operatin' with that fine gal Luisa Bonomi."

"Sir Henry!" said Maureen. "You haven't—I mean, you aren't making passes at some dreadful woman *already?*"

The Ancient One's martyrdom returned.

"Y'see?" he demanded, pointing to Maureen. "What low minds people can have?"

"'Luisa . . .'" Alvarez whistled. "'Luisa Bonomi: Masks and Costumes.' That is the costumier's next door to the jeweller's firm of Bernstein et Cie., in the rue du Statut."

"Got it!" agreed the patriarch, almost complacent again as he stroked his white moustache and mighty beard.

"But why?" insisted Maureen. "I mean, why must you put on these awful clothes?"

"'Cause I'm disguised!" grinned H.M., as though it were the simplest explanation in the world. "And is it a good disguise? Looky here! . . . I told you," he went on with a leer, "I've been all over this place. I've visited shops and—hem—other places in the Kasbah. I went through the fish market. I've visited the British Consulate . . ."

"You haven't!" cried Maureen. "Not as a holy man, surely?"

"Well . . . now," admitted H.M., with another darkly sinister look. "Maybe not. But I used to play golf with old Hack Jefferson, who's consul here now, and I wanted to have a good crack with him. I also had 'em row me out in the harbour . . ."

"What on earth for?"

"Never you mind what for," said H.M., again tilting forward his green tarbush like a noble Arab mobster, and leaning one hand on the table of shirts beside him. "But they didn't twig me once."

Maureen and Alvarez exchanged glances. Maureen could have sworn she heard somewhere noises all but inaudible—whispers, murmurs, movement.

"Finally," thundered H.M., with such a change of mood that she dragged back her thoughts, "I did just exactly what I promised to do."

"And what was that, Sir Henry?" asked Alvarez.

"I went to Colonel Duroc's office, son," said H.M., "and I told him everything. I explained how Iron Chest vanished out of a street in Brussels. I explained how the blighter brought his

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burglar's kit and his iron box invisibly through the customs shed here. I explained how twice, once in Paris and once here, a tableful of diamonds and the same iron chest vanished. When the Colonel saw how simple it all was, he sat and looked at me for about thirty seconds. Then he began to smash the furniture."

Slowly and dismally H.M. shook his head, the great beard wagging. "And, oh, my eye!" he groaned. "How simple it all is!"

"SIMPLE, you say?" inquired Alvarez in his most polite, repressed voice.

"Uh-huh."

Behind Alvarez someone coughed discreetly but with significance.

Alvarez, swinging round, found that M. René Taupin, the proprietor, had been patiently waiting. M. Taupin, a lean and cadaverous Frenchman, wore a tape measure round his neck.

"Monsieur the tailor," continued Alvarez in French, so courteously that M. Taupin bowed, "we are in need of assistance. That gentleman there," he nodded towards H.M., "is in fact a milor' English, who has assumed disguise for a joke."

"Ah, that!" breathed the tailor, enlightened.

"Exactly. Now his robe . . ."

There was a heavy sound as H.M. put down his foot.

"Any howlin' baboon who tries to take this robe, or the whiskers either," he glared, "is goin' to get a fight that'll wreck the whole ruddy street. Got that, son?"

"But the green tarbush must go, Sir Henry," Alvarez insisted. "Also the brown paint off your face."

"We-el . . ." half-conceded the great man, to whom the tarbush was awkward because he could not fashion it firmly to his big skull. Turning a little way, he caught a glimpse of himself in the embrasure of a full-length mirror, and was pleased. Then inspiration caught him.

"A top hat!" breathed H.M. in French. "Is it that you have a top hat?"

M. Taupin shuddered. "The milor' English," he promised, "shall have a hat. Excuse me a little moment."

Hurrying away round the left-hand side of the line of tables, he pushed forward a rolling stepladder to climb up past the line of suits to the long shelf of hats above. Across a table of shirts Alvarez faced Sir Henry Merrivale, who had backed into the mirror embrasure.

"Now, if you please," Alvarez continued, "let us have an explanation at least of how the diamonds and the iron chest vanished from the sealed flat this morning."

A mulish expression overspread H.M.'s face.

"I'm not goin' to do it," he said.

"Sir, can you give one good reason why you cannot speak? This mysteriousness of yours—yes, I have read of it before!—may seriously hamper us . . . that is, the police."

"Oh, no, you don't!" retorted H.M. "I've gone straight to Colonel Duroc, and told him everything I know. What more do you want?"

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Alvarez gave a slight, rueful smile.

"But you do not wish me to have the information. Well! I cannot blame you; it is fair enough."

Abruptly H.M.'s attitude changed. He was glaring down at the floor, writhing with embarrassment.

"Now looky here—" he began in far too loud a voice, and stopped. Then, "Y'know, son," the big voice almost pleaded, "Colonel Duroc really is a very fine feller."

"I have never doubted it, Sir Henry."

"What I mean," persisted H.M., seizing his beard, "he sometimes goes off the deep end, over a matter of discipline or maybe diplomatic duty. But you go off the deep end too."

"I am also aware of that, sir."

"Now looky here!" sputtered the patriarch, with an air of one offering a fair business proposition. "Duroc's as depressed about that resignation business as I bet you are. Why don't you go and see him, son? Tell him you were a trifle hasty, that's all. He'll slap you on the back, and pour a magnum of champagne down your gullet, and tell you to tear up that ruddy resignation for good. It'll be doing a favour for both of you, honest."

"Sir, I will not apologize," said Alvarez. He lifted one hand to shade his badly puzzled eyes. "Don't ask me why, because I do not know. But I cannot and I will not apologize."

H.M. eyed him steadily. "Conquistador," he said.

"I beg your pardon?" Alvarez straightened up.

"Nothing, son," H.M.'s big voice was soothing. "Nothing at all. I was only cogitatin'."

Alvarez faced Sir Henry Merrivale across the table. "Sir," he said, "I will make you a sporting proposition. I am still maddened about the disappearance of the diamonds and the chest from that flat. Possibilities I might have overlooked. You won't tell me about it . . ."

"Easy, son!" growled H.M., again embarrassed. "I couldn't tell you, burn me, because the Colonel made me promise not to. He said you ought to have worked it out for yourself."

"The Colonel again? Indeed. Could *he* work it out for himself?"

"Well . . . no."

"Then hear my proposition. I will admit to the Colonel's face that my whole behaviour was wrong—though no apology, under any circumstances whatever—if you will answer questions about the vanishing of the diamonds and the iron chest. Furthermore, sir, you will answer without any misdirection or—or jiggery-pokery?"

"Jiggery-pokery? *Me?*"

"On your word of honour, sir, will you answer with fair play?"

H.M. stroked his beard in meditation.

"All right, fair enough!" he said.

"Good!" retorted Alvarez. "First question. Was there some hiding place we overlooked? Perhaps a cavity in the walls or floor or ceiling? Or were they in any place we *did* search?"

"No, son." Here the fervent patriarch crossed his heart and

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lifted his right hand. "No hokey-pokey, either! I'll tell you if you're getting warm."

"Not hidden in any secret place we did not discover," muttered Alvarez, "yet not hidden in any place we did search."

"That's right, son," agreed H.M., though he seemed disturbed about something. "But you're warm. You're gettin' warm!"

"Then there is only one thing left!" cried Alvarez, slapping the table in triumph.

Atop the stepladder, M. René Taupin turned deadly pale. With shaking hands he explored a high edifice of hats which must be handled with care lest they fall.

"This man Collier, this red-headed swine, in some fashion spirited these objects out of the flat."

"No," said H.M. "Colder, colder, much colder!" He made mesmeric passes with his brown hands. "All the stuff you're talkin' about was in the flat when you searched it, and was still there when you'd finished."

"*What?*" cried Alvarez.

"Honest Injun, son," the Old Man pleaded, "I'm trying to tell you the strict, literal truth. But there's . . . burn it, there's shades of different meanings in words. For instance, you keep talking about these things being 'hidden.'"

"Yes, yes, yes?"

"Well! In a sense, yes, they were hidden. But in another sense, they weren't hidden at all. They were smack in front of your eyes the whole time. But you couldn't see 'em."

Extending a long forefinger, Alvarez pointed it across the table at H.M.'s nose. "This is hokey-pokey," he declared.

"It ain't, son! I swear it ain't!"

"Another question," gasped Alvarez, "if this be not hokey-pokey! Are the diamonds and the chest still in that room?"

"No, I don't think so. Y'see . . ."

Through their words clove an agonized voice in French.

"Milor' English! Monsieur the Commandant! Is this seemly, I ask you? Is it of the grand politeness?"

"Monsieur the tailor," murmured Alvarez, blandly but firmly, "I am sure you are a man of understanding. We speak of serious matters. Be good enough to remain silent!"

Without taking his eyes from H.M.'s malevolent ones, he reached behind him and gave the stepladder what he sincerely believed to be a gentle admonitory shake.

M. Taupin steadied himself by clutching the wooden ledge above the rack of suits. But, in doing so, he disturbed the towering edifice above. And down on his head poured the avalanche of hats. There were soft felt hats, hard felt hats, many bowler hats, straw hats, conical straw hats, top hats, caps in profusion, tarbushes, all hats of east or west.

"By George, I've got it!" said Alvarez, and again smote the table with his fist. "I think I've got it!"

Alvarez's red-brown eyes, now luminous with inspiration, were

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so locked against the awful gaze of H.M. that neither man was conscious of the descended hats.

"You say that these articles were in the flat," said the hypnotized Alvarez, "yet are not now in the flat. Now a question! Are they still in the same block of flats—the same building?"

"Yes!" thundered H.M. "Son, you're getting hotter than blazes! Now a little step more, in logical reasoning . . ."

"Good God!" said Alvarez. "When I myself observed . . . never mind."

Alvarez whipped out a notebook, uncapped a fountain pen, and scribbled something on the pad. Returning pen and notebook to his pocket, he handed the slip to H.M. The latter took one glance at it, and tore the slip into many pieces.

"Got it!" roared H.M. triumphantly. "Bull's-eye!"

"Then it's what I've been saying all along. This swine Collier *is* Iron Chest!"

"No!" said H.M. "Get that notion out of your onion, son. I haven't got time to explain now; but since this afternoon the Colonel's had a lot more information about Collier, and there were some things you didn't know before. Collier's a smart aleck. He's got no brains. He could no more have devised that vanishing trick than he could have written *Hamlet*. The real Iron Chest showed him how, d'ye see? And let him try it twice."

"But what will happen now?"

"Iron Chest has got a fortune in diamonds—well, you know where—at that block of flats. He's *got* to snaffle 'em tonight, in case we tumble to the trick. He thinks we haven't; but we have. Colonel Duroc will be there, with enough men. But if Iron Chest squirms through the net—" He paused.

"And Collier, sir?" prompted Alvarez.

"Collier!" grunted H.M. He was uneasy. "Yes, Collier's loose. But I think I can guess . . ."

And then, from the back of the gloomy shop, a woman screamed.

"I *thought* I heard voices or something back there," said Maureen in a low voice, as she climbed down the stepladder.

She followed Alvarez, who was striding towards the front so as to circle round the tables on H.M.'s side.

"But what's back there, Juan?" Maureen asked.

"Nothing but a low-to-middle-class French gambling club," smiled Alvarez. "The—er—alleged sophisticates are sometimes here for a good run at chemmy or twenty-one."

"But gambling isn't illegal here, is it?"

"No, little one. But there must be some show of discretion by playing indoors. Otherwise we should have certain people playing at the kerbstone, and whacking down piles of notes on the pavement."

Briefly Alvarez paused, looked at Maureen with intense tenderness, and reverently touched her cheek.

"Now as for you, Sir Henry—" he began, swinging back.

"I ain't me," said H.M.

Carefully adjusting his green tarbush, he folded his arms across

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his beard, set his features to the holy man's look, and backed slowly into the mirror embrasure. Motionless, his eyes closed, H.M. stood there like some special exhibit at Madame Tussaud's.

"But who *are* these people?" whispered Maureen. "I mean, the man and the woman coming towards us."

"One is the Countess Scherbatsky," Alvarez whispered, "and the other is Mr. Mark Hammond. He is a very good sort. But the —er—Countess, though she is good-hearted, is the most blatant gossip from here to Algiers. Don't be surprised at anything you hear or see; but take care what you say!"

ILONE, white Russian Countess Scherbatsky, again screamed piercingly. This was because she recognized someone, Alvarez, whom she had not seen for perhaps three days.

Ilone's dresses were always of the eternal Parisian black like the satiny affair she wore now; she ordered them from Paris. Ilone's earrings, unfortunately, were very large and they were also real diamonds. Once she must have been very pretty; and now, despite the suggestion of dew laps, she would have retained attractiveness if it were not for heavy mascara on the lashes of black eyes, and lipstick which came off too easily. Though she would have given her soul to attract all men with a battery of languishing glances and lip movements, Ilone in fact did not have much sex appeal.

Still, she tried. Her money and above all her good nature won her some lovers, whose names she proudly paraded whenever possible.

Now she came rushing down the aisle, and stopped within six paces of Alvarez. Carefully Ilone placed her handbag on the nearest table. Then she threw wide her arms.

"Von, *mon très, très cher!*" she cried, almost always using English with an admixture of French. "It is vun, two veeks since I zee you! Now I zee you! You are here!"

It was Ilone's custom, when thus affected, to hurl herself against somebody (male or female), to fling her arms round the person's neck, and to plant a lipsticky kiss on both cheeks.

As Ilone rushed forward, Alvarez braced his weight as well as tightening his chest and stomach muscles. Ilone cannoned into him, and, to her astonishment, merely bounced back.

"Von!" pouted Ilone like a small girl. She sought support against a table, and straightened her long-feathered hat. "Zat was not nice! Zat was naugh-*ty!* Never, nevaire vill I forgive!" Ilone stopped. Slowly her dark eyes rolled upwards under mascaraed lashes. Her throaty voice became one of tragedy. "Yes! I forgive you, poor Von. I am R-r-r-ussian! I veep; I laugh! Nobody know vich! *Hélas!* I forgive everybody. Zat is my veakness."

Ilone bowed her head. Suddenly she caught sight of Maureen, who was sidling closer and closer to Alvarez.

"But zis," cried Ilone, whose smile could be attractive when she chose, "zis must be ze sharming American girl vich arrived yesterday in ze arrowplane! Ah, *mon enfant! Que vous êtes belle!*"

And again Ilone flung wide her arms, ready to pounce.

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Casually Alvarez moved to the side of Ilone Scherbatsky. When he dropped his hand on the back of her neck, no observer could have seen in the gesture anything except one of mild affection.

But Alvarez's long, powerful fingers tightened on the sides of Ilone's neck, and they tightened hard.

"Miss Holmes," he said easily, "may I present you to the Countess Scherbatsky?"

Ilone understood the reason for that deadly pressure on her neck, though she gave no sign of it except a wicked little look on her broad good-natured face. Again she smiled.

"'Ow you do, Miss Holmes?" Ilone inquired, and graciously extended her hand. "Permit me to say again zat I find you sharming."

"Thank you so much," said Maureen, taking the large hand and almost immediately dropping it.

Alvarez's fingers relaxed. Ilone straightened her heavy shoulders and gave another little scream.

"Ah, but I too forget! I have someone vich I must present. Oh, *pauvre moi*, and my handbag!" She turned her head. "Mark, *chéri*, you will bring me my handbag. Zis," she cried, attempting a dance step, "is Mr. Mark Hammond, my dear. *Grand écrivain américain! Grand*"—here she let her dark eyes roll and languish—"*grand savant de l'amour! Vous avez compris?*"

Maureen impulsively extended her hand to Mark Hammond. He grasped it in a way she understood.

"How do you do, Miss Holmes?" said Hammond in homely tones. "I'm afraid I must warn you, though, against both charges Ilone Scherbatsky has made against me. I'm not even a very good writer, and certainly I'm not—the other thing. I wish I were."

"I'm sure you underrate yourself," smiled Maureen.

Hammond smiled back wryly. He moved amid a deep aura of gin. But he was not in the least drunk. Thin, rather fragile looking and stoop-shouldered though of decent height, Hammond was almost bald in his middle thirties. He had a long nose, pale eyes, and the air of one who has known many cities.

"How are you, Commandant?" he asked, shaking hands with pleasure. A satirical look rippled up wrinkles in his forehead. "We've known each other—how long? Two or three years, isn't it? I wonder when you'll break down and call me by my first name?"

Alvarez also laughed.

"It has become some kind of necessity," he admitted in a shame-faced way. "No doubt it would interest the late Dr. Freud. But I cannot do it, Mr. Hammond."

"And yet," remarked Hammond, with the thought of Paula always nagging inside him, "you call Bill Bentley by his first name."

"Bill, yes. He is my closest friend. Perhaps my only friend."

"Bah!" screamed Ilone. "Zat Bill Bentley! I hate heem!" She hesitated. "And yet," Ilone let her eyes languish round, conveying an untrue suggestion, "in some vays he is nice. Yes. But he is Anglich! He is not *galant!* He is not *amoureux!* He cannot conwey ze you-know-vat even ven he teach you ze peestol shoot!"

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"The what?" exclaimed Maureen.

Dramatically, Ilone thrust out a heavy arm.

"Bang, bang, bang, bang," she said. Long ago she had persuaded Bill Bentley to give her lessons at target practice with the pistol.

"And this Anglichman!" she screamed. "*Bon Dieu!* He say, 'Damn it, vooman, aim at ze bull-eye!' Or, 'It is not necessary, cone-found it, to shoot the man vich change ze target.' Bah! But if it had been a Frenchman . . ." Here Ilone sighed dreamily.

"And zis Anglichman's vife!" cried Ilone in disgust.

The mild-mannered Hammond spoke sharply. "Take it easy, Ilone!"

"But I say nossing against her," cried Ilone, hurt. She took a few dramatic steps backwards, hand on heart. "No, no, no. . . . *Pauvre* Mark!" Ilone went on, in her small girl's manner. "How he like her! But do I not love everybody? Do I not give parties for everybody? Of this Paula, poor girl, I say only that she is wulgar. *Wulgar!*" screamed the Countess Scherbatsky.

Taking another step backwards, she swung to her left, came face to face with H.M. in the mirror embrasure, and stood paralysed.

OVER all the patriarch's barrel-shaped figure, not a fold of the wine-dark robe moved to show that he even breathed. His eyes were closed, face smoothed out with meditation or prayer.

"And vat is zat?" cried Ilone, pointing with a scarlet-nailed forefinger.

Alvarez stepped deftly in front of the embrasure.

"This gentleman, madame," he said, "is the Moslem prophet named Hassan-el-Mulik, or Hassan the Leader. He has meditated many years in the desert, and has now come to study the most secret writings of Islam."

"Oh, I love zis prophet!" Ilone cried out, clapping her hands. "I tell you! For heem I give a special *keef* party. Vith booze too, of course." Then Ilone beamed at Maureen. "Have you tried ze *keef*, my dear?"

For the first time, the prophet Hassan-el-Mulik stirred in the slightest degree. One eye partly opened, the eye bulging with ghoulish hope and fascination. It closed so quickly that nobody saw it.

"No, Countess Scherbatsky," Alvarez interrupted in a cold voice. "Miss Holmes has not."

Now Ilone smiled playfully at Alvarez.

"*Chéri!*" she yearned at him, picking up a string of pearls and nuzzling them between fine white teeth. "About you, I have also forgot! Ve is old friends, yes? Zen I ask you a k-vestion and you shall answer it!"

"What question, madame?"

"Ve-el," mused Ilone. She dropped the pearls from her teeth. The black eyes grew soulful. "I tell you! At vat time to-night shall your police raid ze block of flats at 40-bis Marshan?"

Nobody moved except Hammond, who glanced angrily at Ilone.

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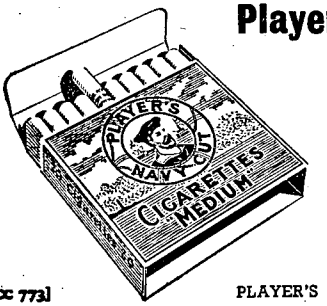

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"Where did you get that information, madame?" Alvarez asked quietly.

Ilone laughed delightedly and unaffectedly.

"You 'ave been in London? Yes, yes, of gourse! I mock myself. The London policemen, vich is called bobbysoxers, are very nice. Zese foreigners say, 'Your policemen, how sveet!'"

"Well, well, well?"

"Why, zen," coquetted Ilone, all archness and coyness, "might zere not be anosser—better, a policeman vich is also an officer, an inspector of police—also sweet? Shall I give you a teeny hint of his last name? *Il est ici à Tangier.* His last name begin with *M.*"

"Mendoza," whispered Alvarez, and clenched his fists. "Inspector Mendoza!"

"Ah, *quel amant!*"

"Did he tell you what happened today?"

Ilone pursed out her lips, and lifted her thick shoulders.

"He told me most of vat has happened inside ze flat at 40-bis Marshan. Ze man G. W. Collier, and you do not find ze beeg chest or ze diamonds. Poor José could not tell all, because he is outside ze door and he cannot catch every word."

Clearly Mendoza had not heard of Alvarez's resignation, or Ilone would have used it as her first taunt.

"Did Inspector Mendoza tell you anything else? About the afternoon—or later?"

"Ah, poor me! Am I arrest? No! José told me only, in ze afternoon, he has passed ze door of the office of Colonel Duroc. Wulgar man; he tell me '. . . no matter. In thees office is an enormous fat man, vich is no good because he never draw a sober brèat' all ze year. Ze fat rummy . . ."

"Never mind that! What did Inspector Mendoza tell you about the afternoon—or later?"

"But I am spikking!" screamed Ilone, and danced heavily on the floor. "Zis dronkard has said that there vill be a raid tonight on the block of flats, because the things are still there. Zat is all he heard; that is all José told me."

"Do you mind if I interrupt, Commandant?" asked Mark Hammond, in a stronger, sharper voice.

"Not at all, Mr. Hammond," smiled Alvarez, rather startled. "Can you help us?"

"That depends. Do you want to know anything about G. W. Collier as a boxer?"

"*I* do. Much!".

"Well, I can tell you everything. The point is, I've followed boxing for more years than I like to count."

The change in Hammond was surprising. His pale eyes had emerged as a sharp, penetrating grey. He had straightened up from his stoop-shouldered lounging. Though there was no flush on his face, something of healthy colour tinged it.

"Yes, of course!" said Alvarez, snapping his fingers as though in remembrance. "I have seen you often at the gymnasium in the

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Boulevard Pasteur. But I never saw you with the gloves on."

The intense bitterness in Hammond's eyes faded to his usual amused tolerance.

"Is it likely?" he asked, and spread out his hands. "Bad heart, bad eyesight, since I was a kid? No weight? Arms far too short? No; forget that. But I don't think there are many people who've watched the game as I have."

Hammond's strong voice seemed to batter at them.

"When I heard Inspector Mendoza mention G. W. Collier as a prize fighter," he went on, "I remembered him because of what the initials 'G.W.' stand for. I hopped over to the 'phone in that gambling room and called Bob Beacon at the American Cultural Centre. He read out what I wanted to know."

From his inside pocket Hammond drew an envelope. Being too vain to wear glasses, he blinked as he consulted the back of it.

"Can you guess what 'G.W.' stands for?" he asked without amusement. "No, don't say George Washington. It stands for Gregor Weehawken. And you can imagine what a noisy, would-be witty crowd"—Hammond's contempt at the word "crowd" baffles description—"would do with a name like Weehawken? But they'd remember it; that's the point."

"What's his record?" asked Alvarez.

"Ten years ago he fought for two and a half years as a professional middleweight. His record's not very impressive. He had forty bouts; won twenty, lost eighteen, two draws. *But*—"

Hammond paused in astonishment at Alvarez's broad smile.

"Good! He does know his business, then."

"Yes, and more. I admit he could never box worth two cents. And he's far past his prime now, of course. But he was a slugger, what they like to call a killer. He keeps on wading in, wading in, to land just one punch that will end the fight."

Hammond paused again, and looked Alvarez straight in the eyes.

"Commandant," he said with deep earnestness, "you're good. You're damn good. *But* . . ."

"I am an amateur?" suggested Alvarez, with a sudden rasp in his voice. "Whereas Collier is a professional?"

"It's God's truth, all the same. The best amateur couldn't possibly, under any circumstances, stand up to an experienced professional. The amateur fights short distances; he doesn't know the tiring, paralysing long distances. His stamina hasn't been fully developed, either to meet that or to meet killer punches. I could give you a dozen reasons; but put it down that he can't meet ringcraft and he can't meet heavy punches."

"Thank you very much for your advice, Mr. Hammond." Alvarez also was sincere. "Now, I am afraid, we must turn back to . . ."

"Commandant," Hammond interrupted quietly, "don't try to tangle with Collier. Stay away from him. He'll slaughter you."

There was another bursting kind of pause.

"Mr. Hammond," Alvarez said, "we have a criminal case on

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our hands. It was my fault; I let you divert me with our talk. First catch our Collier! Will you forgive me?"

Mark Hammond, with his famous good manners, bowed after the Continental style. But all the personality drained out of him. He sat down, stoop-shouldered, on the table beside Ilone.

Maureen knew that Alvarez wanted to communicate with H.M. But he dared not turn his head.

"Maureen, my dear," he said at last, "do you think we ought to telephone Colonel Duroc at once, and have Inspector Mendoza put out of the way where he can do no more damage for the moment?"

The prophet's head, in full view of Maureen, gave a faint negative shake as though he stirred in sleep. The tassel of his green tarbush, which hung straight down in front, twitched outwards left and right as though he would indicate Hammond and Ilone. Maureen was guessing at this; but she guessed correctly.

"No, Juan," she replied in her clear voice. "I don't think Uncle Henry would want us to. At least," and her green eyes moved innocently towards the others, "for a moment."

"Ah, good!" said Alvarez.

But Ilone was advancing towards him, so emotionally torn that all her jewels rattled, and her hands were clenched.

"'Out of ze vay?'" she gasped, sending back at him his words about Inspector Mendoza. "My José? You do not mean my José? You vill not punish him?"

"In the devil's name, madame, what did you expect?"

Ilone screamed. "José! I have betray him!"

Maureen Holmes felt herself go hot and cold with rage. Mark Hammond had already stood up, put the envelope into his pocket, and consulted his watch.

"Come along, Ilone," he said with weary patience. "We were supposed to be at a cocktail party at five o'clock. It's now a quarter to six."

"Vat is cocktails?" hissed Ilone. "*I vill not go!*"

"You think not, madame?" inquired Alvarez, locking up her right arm and elbow behind her back. It hurt; he meant it to hurt. He marched her to the door without fuss. Ilone, one shivering mass of fury, dared not even speak lest he increase the pressure.

"Think you can take over now?" Alvarez asked.

"Oh, yes." With a swift dexterity, surprising in one who deprecated the use of his hands, Hammond caught the grip from Alvarez. But clearly he still brooded on one subject.

"Commandant," said Hammond, "there's only one kind of amateur who could possibly beat Collier in a short fight. That's a pure slugger." Hammond looked thoughtful, but made a grimace without speaking any name, "Who'd trade punches like Collier himself, and might land a haymaker. Come along, Ilone!"

Alvarez, in a black mood, went back into the tailor's and slammed the door to the accompaniment of a sharp ping from the bell. He strode down the right-hand side, in the direction of the mirror embrasure.

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Far down on the right, the venerable Hassan-el-Mulik—now transformed into Sir Henry Merrivale because his tarbush was crushed over one ear—had found the most modern of dial telephones. He was speaking to Colonel Duroc in a low, bass rumble in which no word could be distinguished.

Alvarez stood with his back towards the rack of fusty-smelling suits. They were hung high and heavy on their metal rod. He put his hands on the fairly filled table in front of him, leaned his weight on them, and lowered his head.

"Now," said Maureen, "will you please, *please* listen to me?"

He lifted his head and spoke across it to Maureen.

"I have never really loved any woman but you," he burst out. "In you there is every trait, save one, which can drive a man to madness." Astonishingly, his expression was dark and bitter. "You are generous; you would have helped me when you thought me poor. You are loyal, as witness Sir Henry. You are intelligent. You are romantic-minded, and easily moved to tenderness. *But*—"

Here Alvarez straightened up, with the same bitter look.

"I have seen you before," he said. "Oh, yes! I have seen you, with your pale face and your slender neck and your green eyes and your death-black hair, all aureoled and glowing in a window of the Cathedral at Seville. You are just as unapproachable. Just as remote. Just as cold."

"Oh!" said Maureen inadequately. But it was only a gasp of amazement and anger. "Well, why don't you kiss me and find out!"

Alvarez looked at her blankly.

"*What?*"

"D-d-didn't you hear me?"

He put one hand on the table, to vault over it and reach her. His gaze left hers for only a third of a second. But, when he looked up again, Maureen's whole expression had changed. Her large eyes, with tears on the long black lashes, had widened to full extent and they were fixed in a look of horror. She was not even looking at him. She was staring past Alvarez at the rack of suits behind him.

Alvarez spun round to the sound of hangers sliding on metal. He came face to face with Gregor Weehawken Collier.

COLLIER stood framed in an opening between the two lines of suits, his back to the wall where he had room to move, his hands up somewhere in the hangers. His hair was dyed a heavy black, and he wore a red tarbush. Otherwise he was dressed the same and looked the same, with his drooping eyelids and his eternal sneer.

It went so fast that nobody had time to think of the simple explanation of how or why he had come there. After that stunned instant, Alvarez plunged for the gap in the suits. Collier's hands, up on the coat hangers, swept together that close-packed mass in his opponent's face. Then Collier's hand shot higher, gripping the metal rod above.

There was from each side a separate *craa-ack*, with long tearing noises, as Collier ripped the whole rod from its screw supports, and

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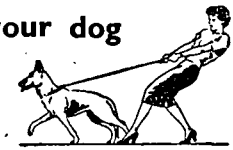

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flung the mass of suits outwards and downwards over Alvarez's head.

"Wise guy," said the sneering voice of Collier.

Alvarez, in sick fury, fought his way up through what seemed a weight that pressed him down by its mere rolling softness. Springing to his feet, he was just in time to hear the bell ping and see the shop door close. He vaulted over the nearest table, reached the door in two strides, flung it open, stepped out—and stopped.

He must not rush out into the crowd, and fall for the old trick by which a fugitive presses himself close against the wall on a side of the door. Alvarez's head twitched to the right, towards the sedan chair. He saw his warning in the eyes of the bearers, one of whom started to point. Alvarez spun to the left, not quite in time.

Down on his head, towards the back, crashed the weight of a weapon which Collier would have called a sap. It was not a clean smash, but that hardly mattered.

Alvarez did not go down. He would not go down. In that moment of too-great rage, you could not have dropped him with half a ton of stones.

He whipped round—and again faced Collier, whose back was to the wall and without elbow-room to swing the sap.

His right fist drove so hard into Collier's belly that Collier half doubled up, the breath struck from his body with a sound grotesquely like a man retching, yet louder.

Trying to clear his swimming eyesight, Alvarez steadied himself

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to throw his left. In vague surprise he saw there was nobody there.

Collier had slipped behind Alvarez. Even now he managed a high, giggling laugh of mockery. Again the weight of the sap crashed down on Alvarez's head.

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ANSWERS to FURTHER OUTLOOK UNSETTLED on page 16

1. *Fancy Day in "Under the Greenwood Tree," by Thomas Hardy. Having persuaded her father of her love for Dick Dewy, she is suddenly confronted with an offer of marriage from the vicar, Mr. Maybold.*
2. *Lady Julia Cressey in "Crazy Pavements," by Beverley Nichols. In love with the young journalist, she wrote to him letters which fell into the hands of Lady Anne Hardcastle, who blackmailed her.*
3. *Catherine Morland in "Northanger Abbey," by Jane Austen. Because the rain delayed Henry and Eleanor Tilney, she was obliged to ride with the boastful John Thorpe.*
4. *Private Angelo in the novel of that name, by Eric Linklater. Angelo, deserter from the army, admitted his lack of courage, but events showed how he gradually acquired it.*
5. *Richard Hannay in "The Thirty-Nine Steps," by John Buchan. On the moors Hannay fell into the headquarters of the foreign spy-ring.*
6. *The owl and the pussy-cat, in the verse of that name by Edward Lear, were married by the Turkey who lived on the hill.*
7. *Rhayader in "The Snow Goose," by Paul Gallico. Beneath his ugliness, Rhayader was a kind man who tended the wounded bird brought to him by the child Frith.*
8. *Lord Ullin's Daughter, in the ballad of that name by Thomas Campbell. She and her lover were consequently drowned.*

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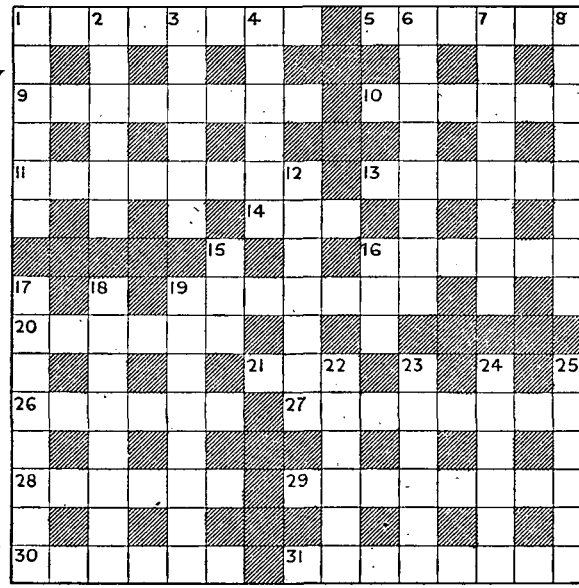
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 40



CLUES

Across

1 Hybrid at an anniversary (8).

5 Scilicet in brief one from the Middle East; indeed, a gem (6).

9 What old soldiers do (4, 4).

10 Post before this would make it an after-thought (6).

11 Eel tonic. What a choice! (8).

13 An awful blot begins with backward rims (6).

14 The little grumble in the middle of a verbal puzzle (3).

16 How to make good ill-assorted couples? (6).

19 A dog in uniform? (7).

20 To play a Scottish game we go back—and get the bird (6).

21 And so on (3).

26 It sounds like a strange song, but it could be anything fantastic (6).

27 Would you be surprised if this came from the plane? (8).

28 Something to reckon with! (6).

29 Devon ore is evidently too much exploited (8).

30 It's an odd number, contrary to its ending (6).

31 How to draw when you are given *carte blanche!* (4, 4).

Down

1 They are hardly likely to serve one with punch here (6).

2 A stern necessity in most cases (6).

3 The art, young man, is boisterous and concealed (6).

4 It would need very little to make this part of Spain a model (6).

6 "'Tis not *her* coldness, father, That chills my labouring breast; It's that confounded — I've ate and can't digest,"—R. H. Barham (8).

7 Two means of transport in one? (8).

8 Some doubt seems to prefix this slaughter (8).

12 To tell, and finally assess (7).

15 "Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods. Not — him as a carcass fit for hounds" — Shakespeare (3).

16 The colour of the Danube, according to Bruce Marshall! (3).

17 The coda, Alec, is part of a ceremony (8).

18 To scale off, by degrees, so to speak (8).

19 It's advisable to do this before using it in an experiment, no doubt (4, 4).

22 A hundred and fifty more, and to be in this would be luxury (6).

23 A yard to the S.E. it's not so dense (6).

24 There's a god in this shrine! (6).

25 Concentrate; particularly on final things? (6).

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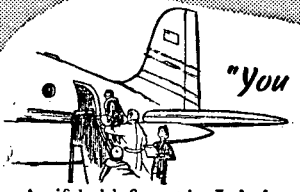

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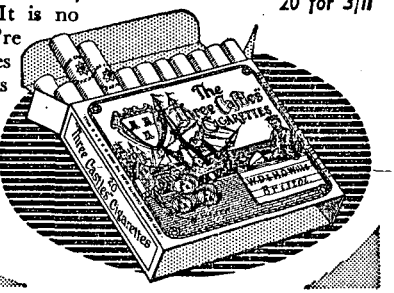

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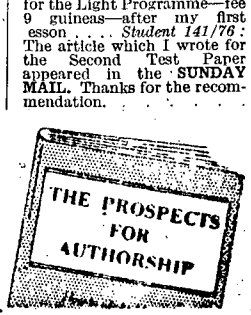

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